LUFTWAFFE COLOURS

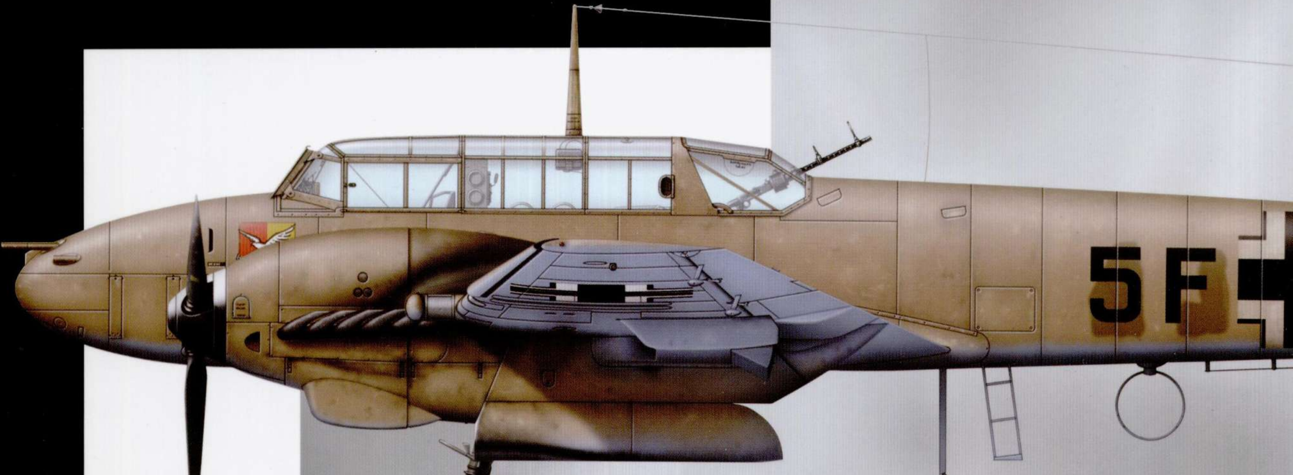
CLASSICOLOURS

ZERSTÖRER

Volume Two

John J. Vasco

LUFTWAFFE FIGHTER BOMBERS AND DESTROYERS 1941-1945



LUFTWAFFE FIGHTER-BOMBERS AND DESTROYERS

1941–1945

"The great bulk of the crippling losses which the VVS sustained in aerial combat during the first year of the Russian campaign were the results of encounters with well-trained German fighter units and their superior aircraft... The fighter units were augmented by so-called Zerstörer (destroyer) formations equipped with the Messerschmitt Bf 110 twin-engined long-range fighter and light bomber. A failure over Great Britain in 1940, the 110's range, varied weapon load, and speed gave it a new lease on life in Russia."

Dr Richard R. Muller, *The German Air War in Russia*, 1992

"By the summer of 1943, twin-engine fighters were equipped with multiple rocket projectors of large calibre, firing time-fuzed rockets. The rocket-firing twins were found to be highly lethal to bombers when fired in salvo from a formation... All these attacks were planned for execution beyond Allied escort range since these aircraft were no match for our fighters. Their success in the fall of 1943 then appeared to be the answer to Allied bomber formations. On the vital penetrations to targets deep in Germany, US superiority in the air in daylight was put in serious doubt."

The United States Strategic Bombing Survey:
The Defeat of the German Air Force,
Military Analysis Division, July 1947

1941

Redeployment

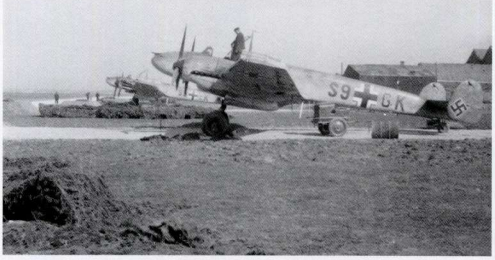
1941 opened with the *Zerstörer* day force considerably changed from the beginning of 1940. Whereas the *Bf 110* units had performed creditably in the first six months of 1940, the Battle of Britain proved to be the campaign in which the shortcomings of the aircraft as a daytime escort fighter were fully exposed. That campaign also cut a swathe through the officer class in the *Zerstörer* units.

V.(Z)/LG 1 had suffered heavy losses during the Battle of Britain, and was redeployed back to Germany, disbanded, and the remaining personnel formed the nucleus of the night fighter unit, *I. Gruppe, Nachtjagdgeschwader 3* (*I./NJG 3*). The two *Gruppen* of *ZG 2*, another unit that was withdrawn towards the end of the Battle, were disbanded with remaining personnel again moving to the night fighter force.

The three *Gruppen* of *ZG 26* remained intact and were only withdrawn to Germany in November and December 1940. This *Geschwader* would see service on nearly all fronts in the years to come.

As for *ZG 76*, after *I. Gruppe*'s one and only disastrous mission during the Battle of Britain [1], it remained at Stavanger until September 1940, when it was transferred to the night fighter arm and re-designated *II./NJG 1*. *II./ZG 76* retained its designation upon being withdrawn to Jever in September 1940. *III./ZG 76* headed to northern Europe in October 1940, Stavanger-Sola becoming its new base.

So it was that of all the main *Bf 110* units deployed against England in 1940, only *Erprobungsgruppe 210* (*Erpr. Gr. 210*) remained on the Channel Front at the beginning of 1941. This unit was undergoing a period of change, with the *Bf 109 E*-equipped 3. *Staffel* permanently detached from the unit to ultimately join *4./JG 51*. The formation of a new 3. *Staffel* with *Bf 110*s had already started in December 1940.


ABOVE: Bf 110 Es of 2./Erpr. Gr. 210, S9+GK, and S9+EK in the distance. Note the rectangular air inlet on the nose, a feature first introduced on the 'E' variant, and the cable running along the top of the fuselage attached to the dinghy enclosed in the extended rear fuselage. On later production batches of the 'E' the extended rear fuselage housing emergency equipment was dispensed with, the shortened rear fuselage of the 'B' and 'C' variants returning.

Erpr. Gr. 210 left its 1940 base at Denain, and took up residence at Merville, Berck-sur-Mer and Abbeville. The crews of the newly-constituted *3./Erpr. Gr. 210* undertook a blind flying course in January 1941. Missions would be markedly different from those in 1940. Dusk missions were undertaken against military and industrial targets in the south-east of England, and daytime operations saw aircraft of the unit hunting shipping in the Channel and the North Sea once again. No longer were missions carried out in *Gruppe* strength, but mainly by single aircraft at dusk, or elements of two or four aircraft during the day.

Whereas almost no activity occurred in January, *Erpr. Gr. 210* was in action again in the early days of February and one of the earliest losses was the crew of *Uffz.* Josef Roming, pilot, and *Bordfunker Gefr.* Robert Schlund, who did not return from a mission against shipping in the Thames Estuary on 3 February. Roming and Schlund had only been posted to the unit in early October 1940 and had therefore seen little front line service. They were flying a *Bf 110 E-1*, the 'E' being the variant the unit mostly flew now as evidenced by the loss returns submitted since the start of the year. The occasional loss was suffered during February due to accurate anti-aircraft fire while attacking shipping. In March only one crew was lost, but the unit had its share of damaged aircraft due to belly landings and crash landings. Plans were now afoot for the forthcoming campaign against Russia, and April would be the last month of *Erpr. Gr. 210*'s existence. Three crews were lost in April, the last being an unfortunate crash on take-off for a dusk mission on 16 April. On 24 April, *Erpr. Gr. 210* became *I. Gruppe, Schnellkampfgeschwader 210* (*SKG 210*). *SKG 210* was a two *Gruppen Geschwader*, the *II. Gruppe* being raised from the re-designation of *III./ZG 76*. Changes were made to the leadership of the new *Geschwader*. *Major* Walter Storp was posted in as *Geschwaderkommodore*, and *Hptm.* Karl-Heinz Stricker took up post as *I. Gruppe Kommandeur*. Both had a background in bombers, not fighters or fighter-bombers.

III./ZG 76, based at Stavanger-Sola as mentioned earlier, had moved to the quieter northern area of Europe in October 1940 and took up the role of flying defensive operations in the protection of shipping. The move north also resulted in the *Gruppe* taking on charge *Messerschmitt Bf 109 E*s. *III./ZG 76* would record losses of *Bf 109*s as well as *Bf 110*s in its returns in the early part of 1941. Loss returns showed that the *Gruppe* operated a mix of *Bf 110* 'C's, 'D's and 'E's. Meanwhile, in January, a detachment of crews moved to Kjevik to form '*Jagdkommando Kjevik*'. Together with the *Bf 109*s on charge, they were re-designated *I./JG 77*. The pilots were all officers holding the rank of *Leutnant*: Felix Brandis; Walter

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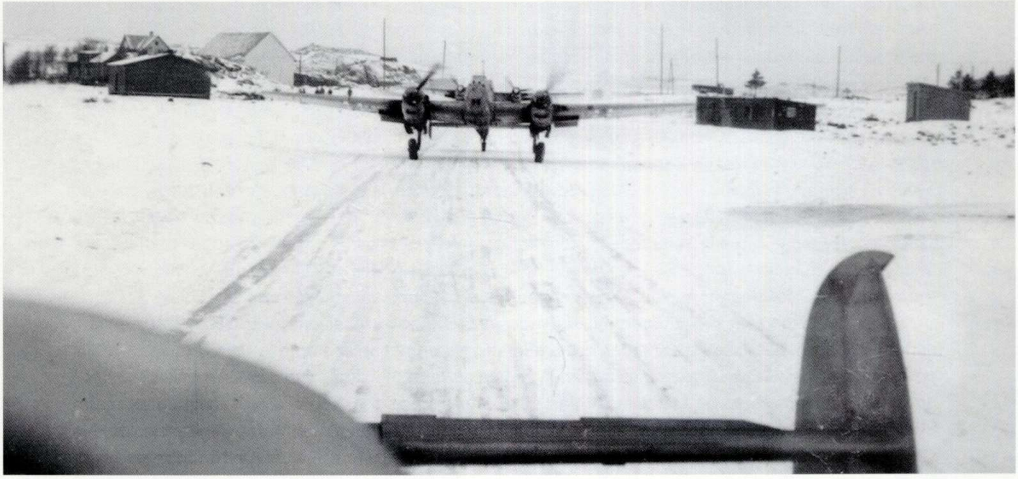
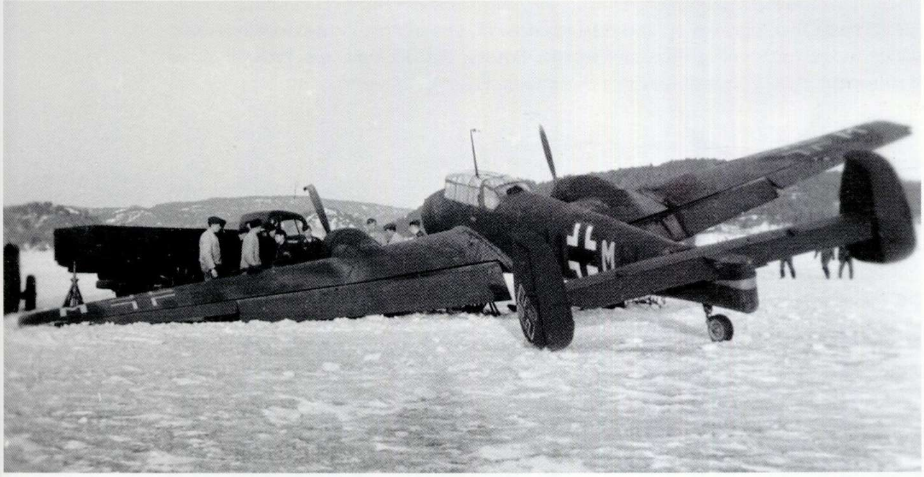
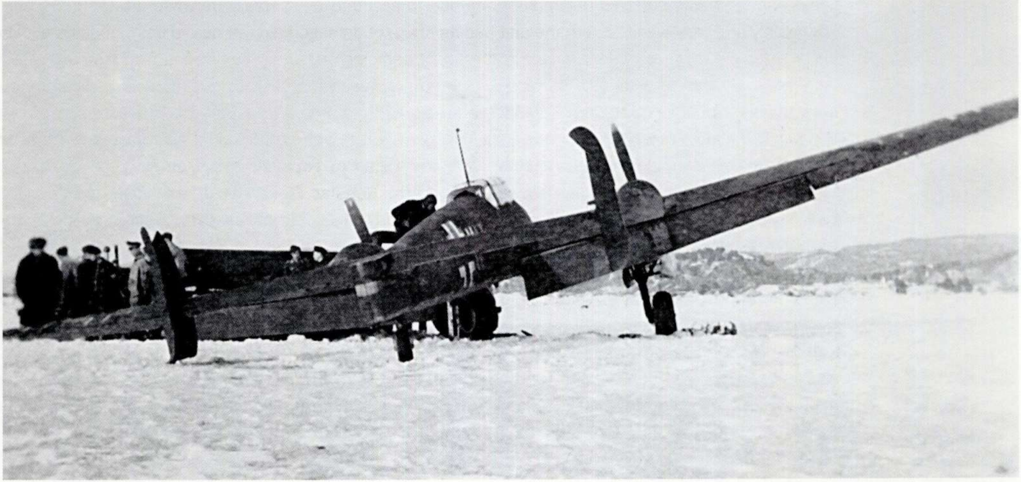
1. See Classic Colours, Zerstörer, Volume One.





ABOVE: Bf 110s of III./ZG 76 taxi-ing along what appears to be a frozen road in early 1941.

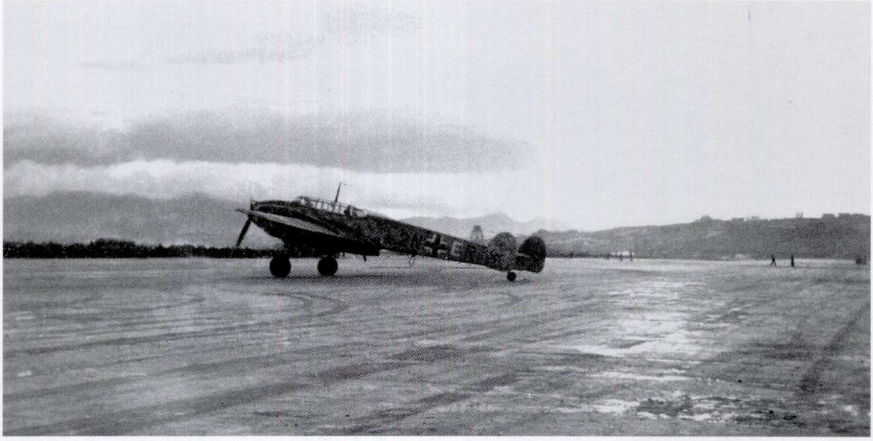
ABOVE AND RIGHT: Two views of a Bf 110 of III./ZG 76 that has suffered port undercarriage failure. Note the light area around the extended rear fuselage.



Dieterichs; Max Franzisket; Dietrich Klappenbach; Ferry Laskovic; Helmut Viedebannt; Dieter Weyergang and Karl Fritz Schlossstein. Brandis would later rise to the post of *Staffelkapitän* of *6./JG 5*, while Viedebannt would reach *Major* through the fighter-bomber units *SKG 210, ZG 1* and *SG 10*. For *I.(Z)/JG 77*, which was also using Mandal as a base, the following months into spring would bring the occasional contact with enemy aircraft. April proved to be a month of notable activity, with Viedebannt's *Bf 110* being damaged in combat on 18 April. As a consequence his *Bordfunker* baled out into the sea and was posted missing. *Bf 110*s were lost on 21 and 24 April, both going down into the sea. In May, three crash landings occurred, with no casualties to the crews involved. One event of note towards the end of May was the unit's involvement in providing air cover for the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* on 21 May. Six days later the *Bismarck* was sunk. By early June, the unit code had been changed on its aircraft from '2N' to that which later became identified with the *Zerstörerstaffel* of *JG 5*, 'LN'. Quite why the unit designation did not follow the normal letter/number or number/letter format has never been satisfactorily explained.

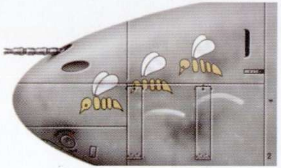
Throughout the first four months of the year, *III./ZG 76* flew missions, with January showing a series of take off and landing accidents accounting for all of the damage entries recorded. In February one *Bf 110* was lost while on a '*Feindflug*'. In March a *Bf 110* of *III./ZG 76* was shot down by anti-aircraft fire over the Shetland Islands. Of particular interest was the fact that this aircraft was coded M8+WE. 'M8' is associated with *I.* and *II. Gruppen* of *ZG 76*, '2N' being the normal code for *III. Gruppe*. The possible explanation is the transfer of an aircraft between *Gruppen*, or a repaired aircraft re-issued to *III. Gruppe* without the unit code being changed. Additionally, the *IV. Gruppe* letter 'E' does not conform to standard practice.

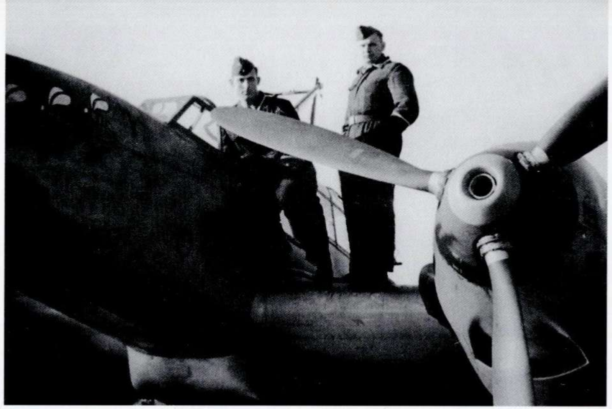
With *III./ZG 76* being re-designated *II./SKG 210* towards the end of April in preparation for that unit's participation in the forthcoming campaign against Russia, the decision was taken that the detachment of crews with *I./JG 77* would remain in Norway as *1.(Z)/JG 77*.

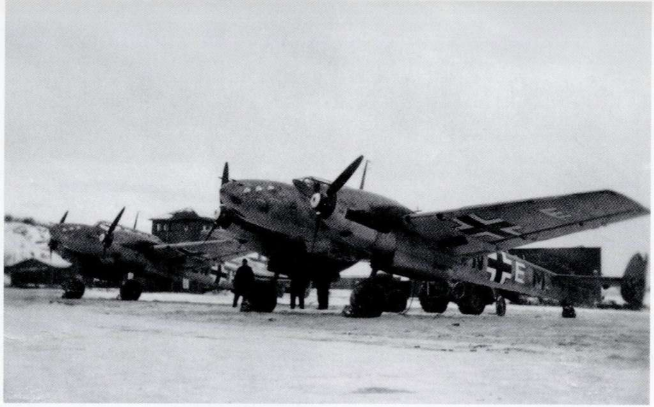


RIGHT: This Bf 110, 2N+ER, of I./JG 77 seen in May 1941 shows the revised Staffel letter of 'R' in the fuselage code used by the Zerstörerstaffel of JG 77.

The *I. Gruppe* of *SKG 210* continued operations against English targets into May. The 3. *Staffel* crew of Helmut Lußky (pilot) and Karl-Fritz Schröder (*Bordfunker*) had a lucky escape on a night mission early in May. After receiving hits from a RAF night fighter, with Lußky taking violent evasive action to prevent further damage to their machine, they managed to get their damaged Bf 110 back to base. Luck would continue to smile on both of them: on the Russian Front their *Bf 110* was hit by an enemy tank during a low-level attack on Russian armour and Lußky could only just manage to keep control of the aircraft with one wing heavy. Schröder could not believe it when Lußky told him to strap himself in tight as they approached the ground, as he was going to let go of the controls and let the aircraft flip! Lußky timed it to perfection, and as the *Bf 110* reached the horizontal plane again a few metres from the ground, he regained control and held it level with all his strength for a few seconds and carried out a good belly landing. "That man saved my life," Schröder said in later years at a unit reunion. Schröder was later shot down behind Russian lines when flying with *13.(Z)/JG 5*. Baling out, he spent several days hiding during the day and travelling at night before reaching German lines again. Lußky's aircraft was shot out of the sky in the final days of the war over Austria by American fighters, but he survived this also. Post-war both lived on into retirement.

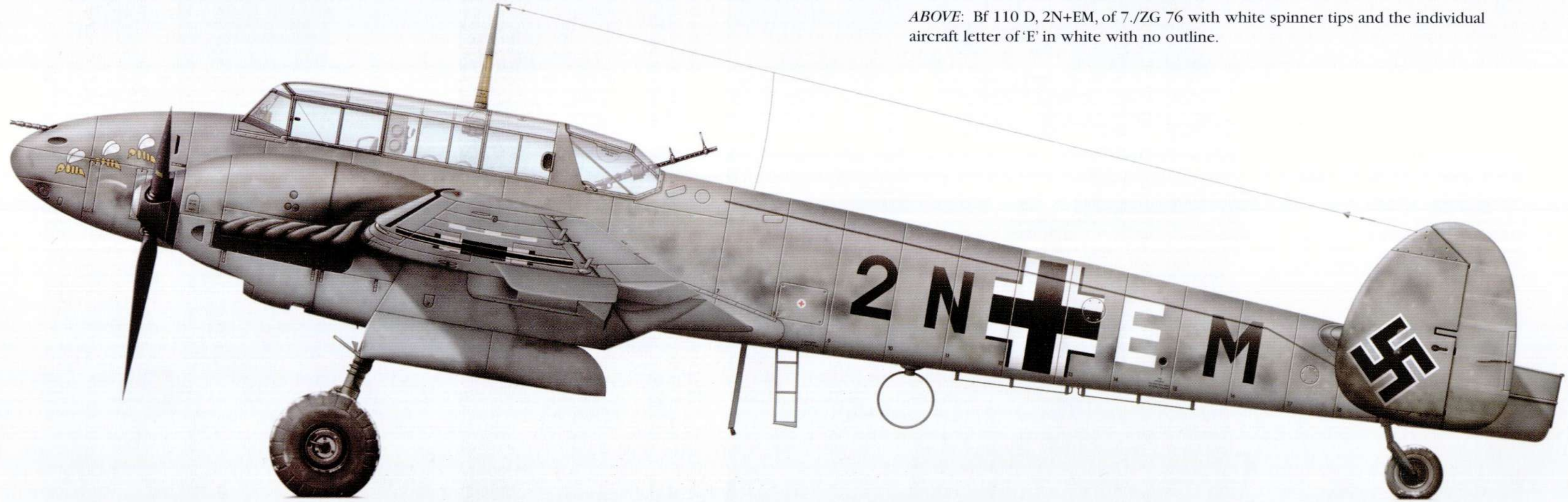






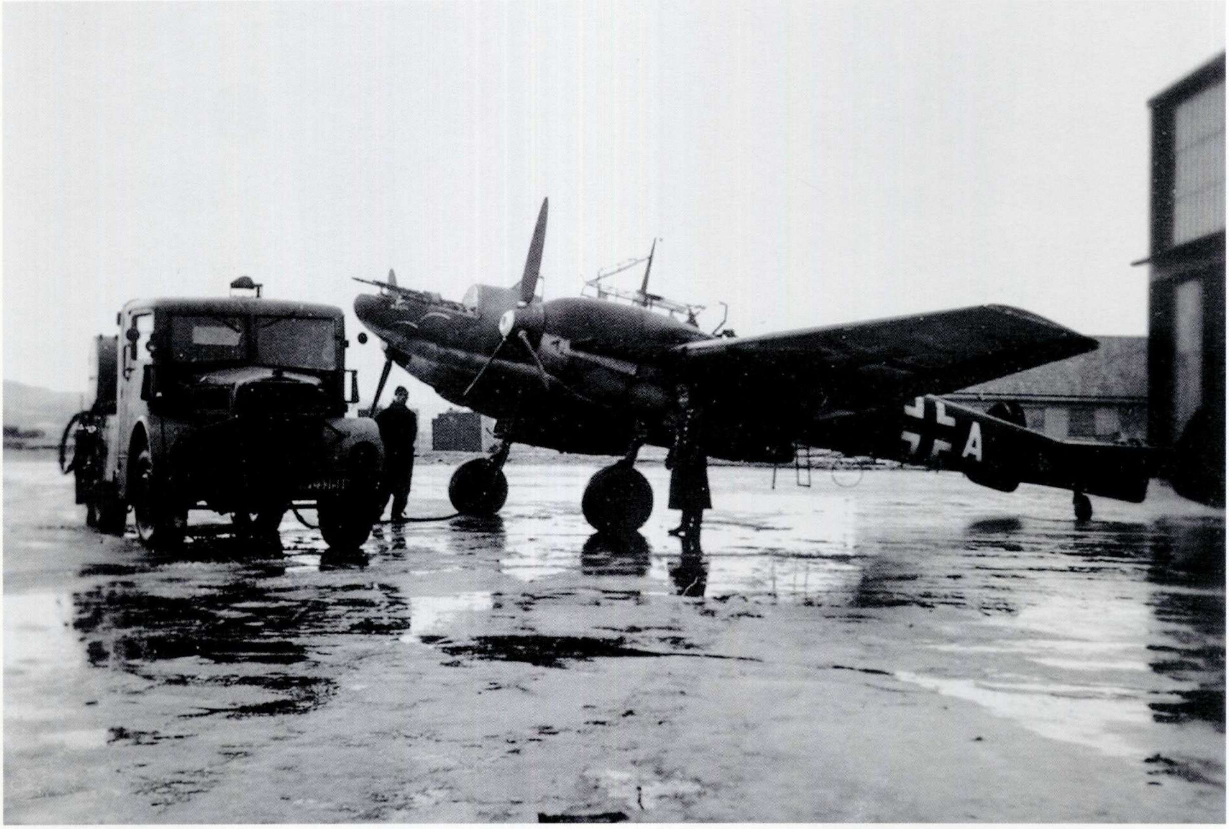
ABOVE LEFT: The three wasps emblem of III./ZG 76 can be seen on this Bf 110 E. Note also the bomb rack under the fuselage.

ABOVE: Bf 110 D, 2N+EM, of 7./ZG 76 with white spinner tips and the individual aircraft letter of 'E' in white with no outline.

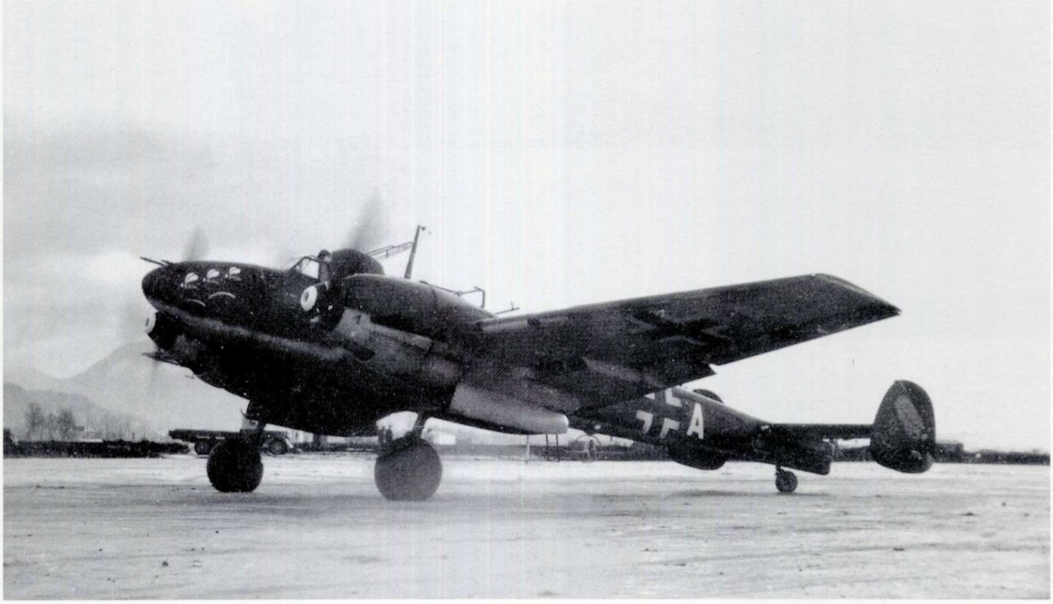


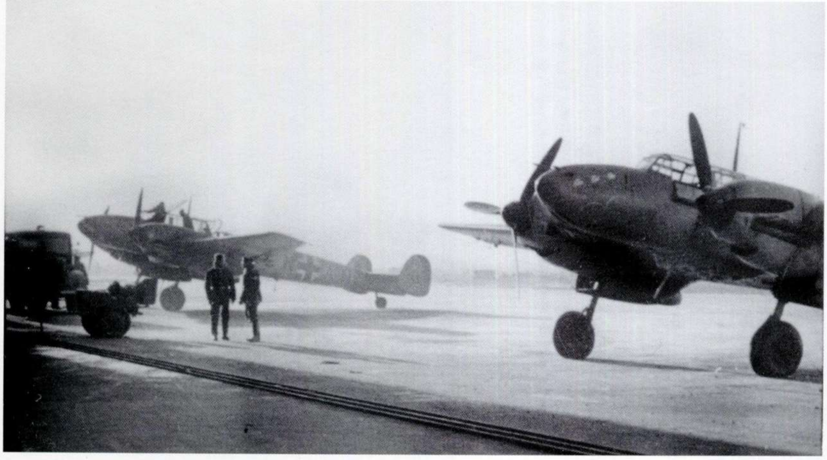
Messerschmitt Bf 110 D, 2N+EM, of 7./ZG 76

This Bf 110 D, 2N+EM, of 7./ZG 76 carries a light mottle down the fuselage sides. The Gruppe emblem of three small wasps above clouds can be seen on the nose. The extended rear fuselage, common to the 'D' variant, can also be seen.

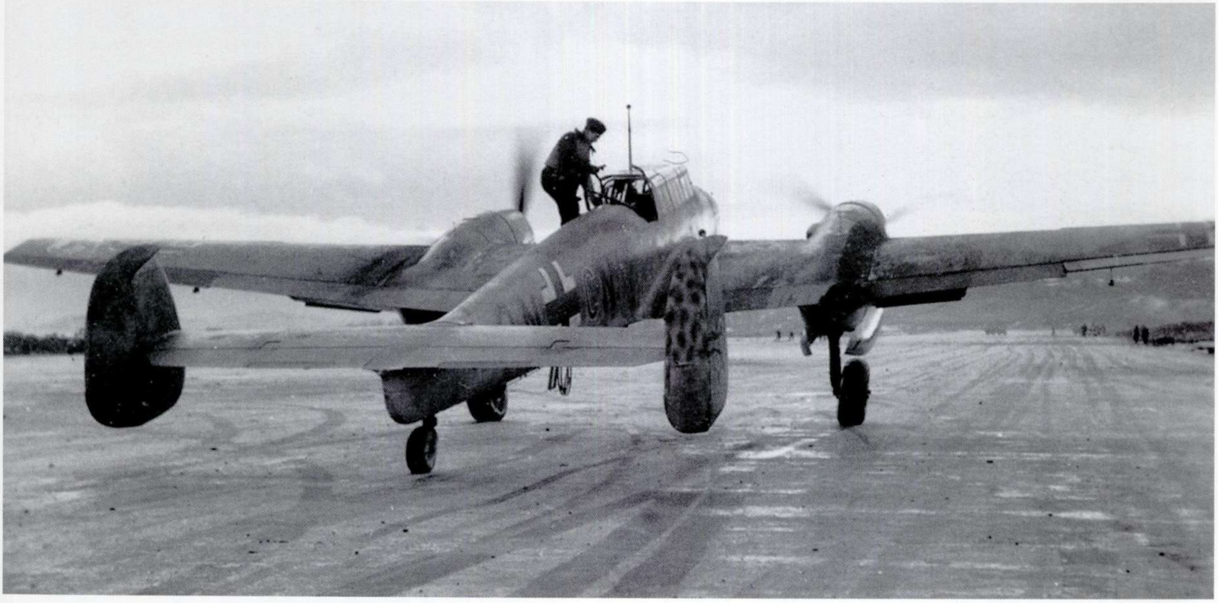


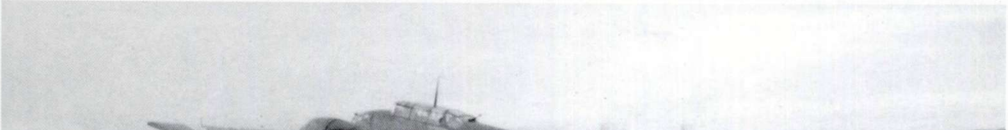
ABOVE AND BELOW: Two views of 2N+AM of 7./ZG 76 displaying the same features as the previous photograph of white spinner tips and the letter 'A' in white with no outline. However, unlike 2N+EM which had mottled fuselage sides, this Bf 110 D has solid camouflage on the fuselage sides.





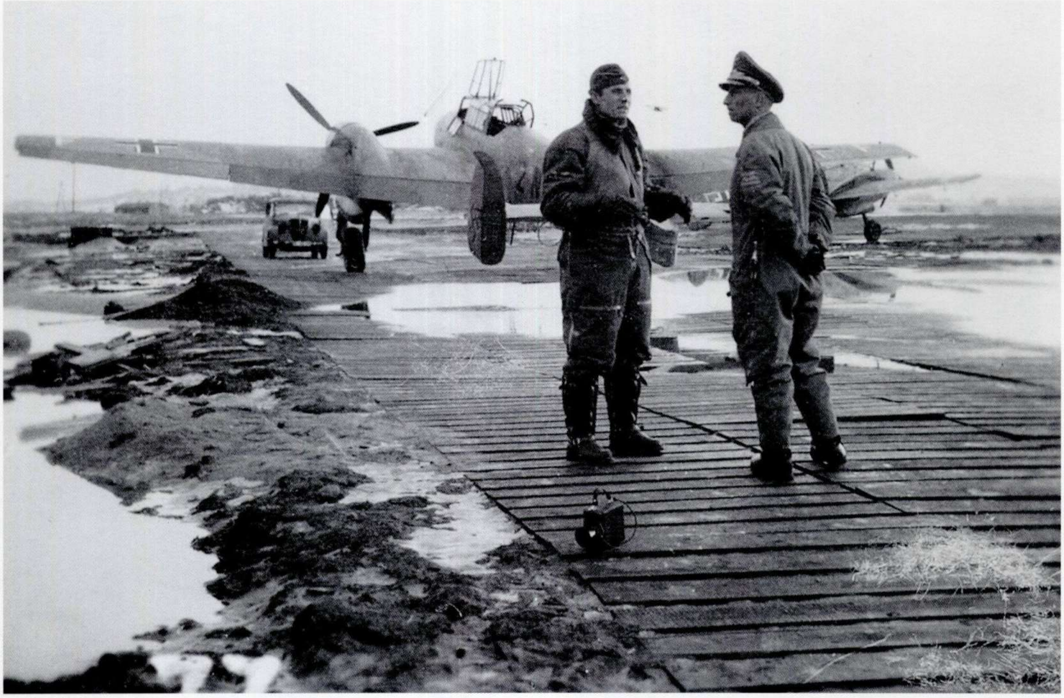
LEFT: Bf 110 D, 2N+AN, of 8./ZG 76, displaying the extended rear fuselage common to the variant. The letter 'A' appears to be black outlined in white.

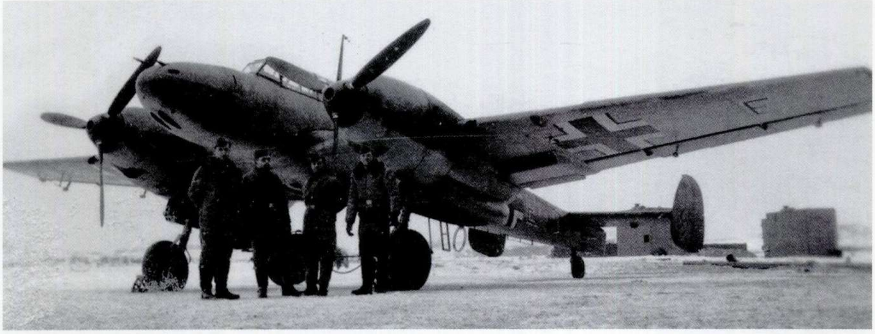




ABOVE: Both engines are run up on 2N+CN. Of particular interest is the unusual mottle on the starboard rudder. Note also the two colour camouflage on the spine of the aircraft, with a definite third colour on the fuselage side.

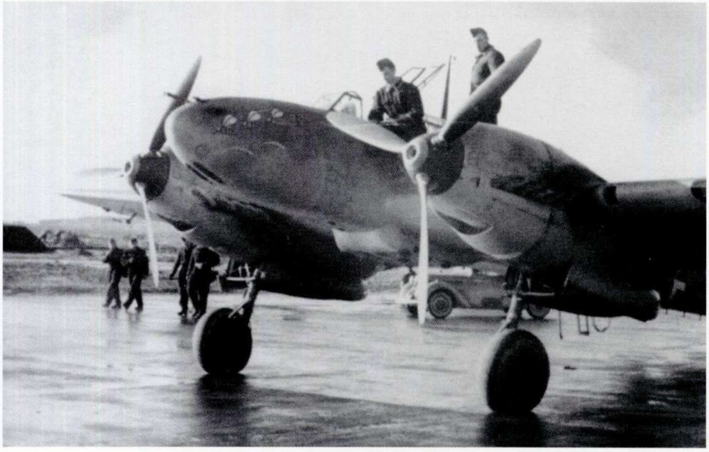
LEFT: The man with the flags ducks as a Bf 110 D of III./ZG 76 thunders down the runway prior to take-off. Note the same camouflage colours on this aircraft as on 2N+CN.



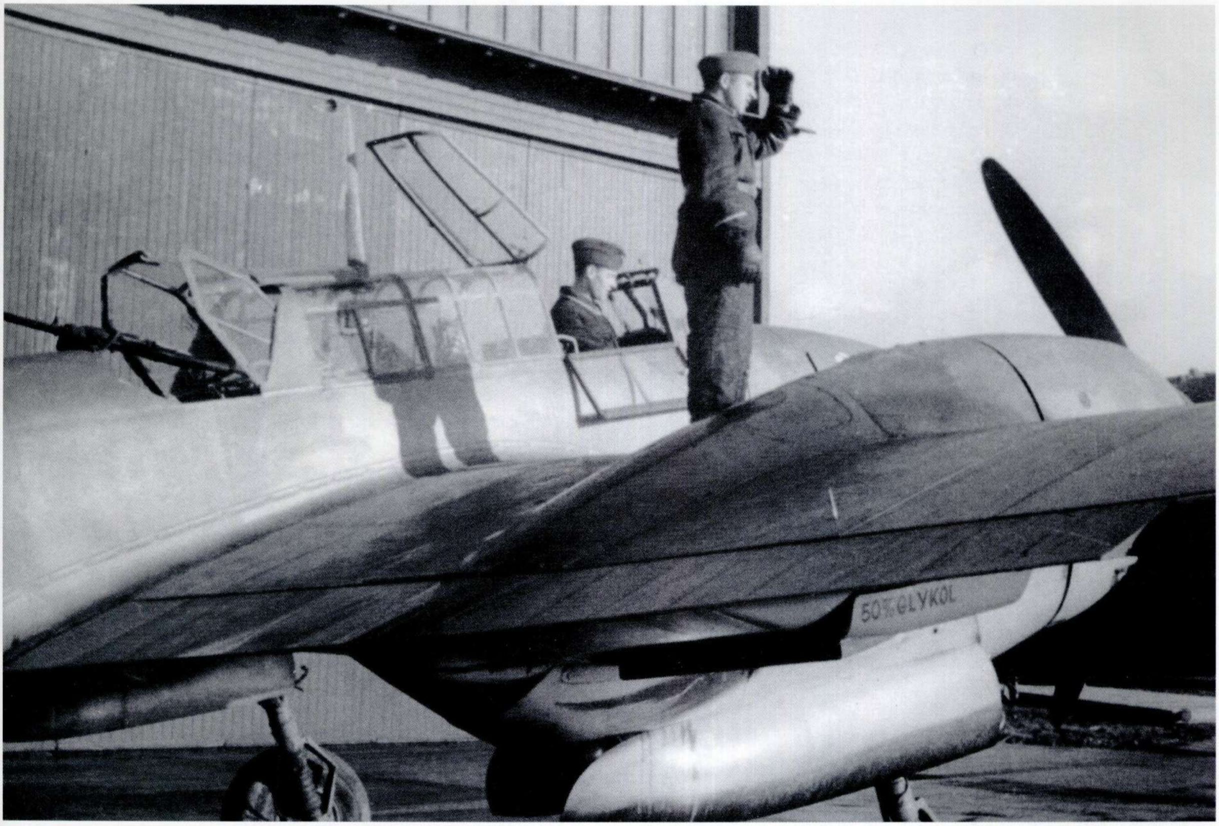


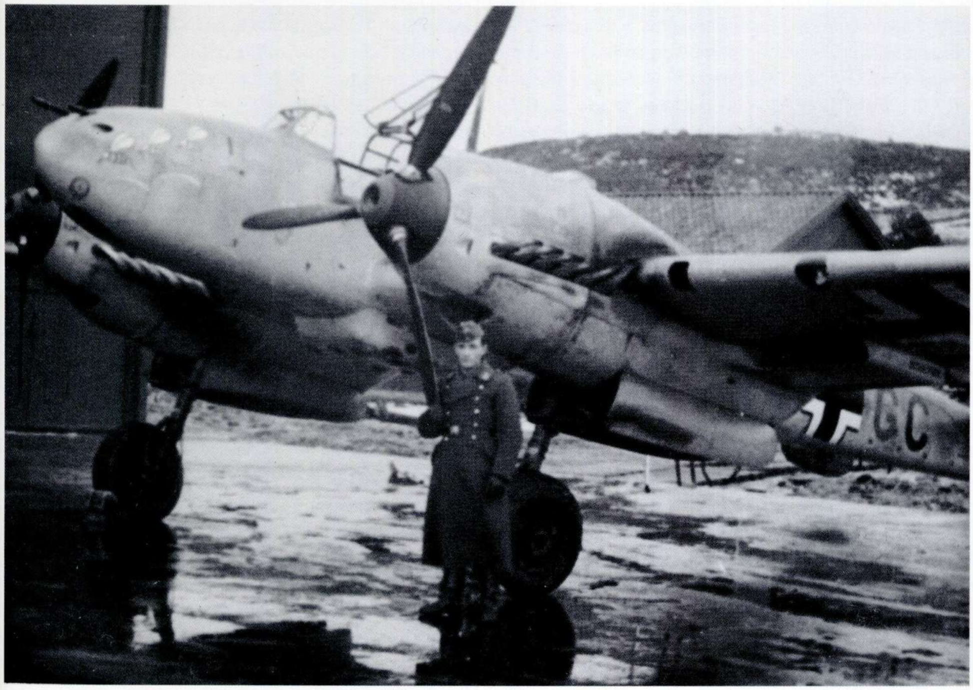
ABOVE: 2N+FM forms a backdrop to two aircrew in animated discussion. Note the muddy conditions, with boards laid down for the aircraft to taxi on. Seen to good effect is the starboard wing camouflage pattern.

ABOVE: Personnel of 8./ZG 76 pose in front of Bf 110 D, 2N+EN. Spinner tips appear to be red, and the individual aircraft letter, 'E' is in black with a white outline under the wing.



RIGHT: This Bf 110 of III./ZG 76 carries a lighter camouflage not only on the fuselage sides but also on the engine cowlings. The three small wasps emblem is seen to good effect.



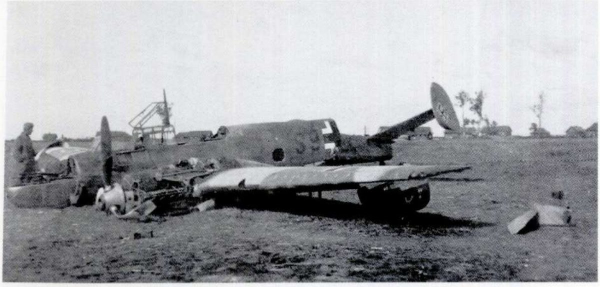


ABOVE: Something of interest appears to have caught the attention of the ground mechanic on the starboard wing. Note the instruction '50% Glykol' on the side of the radiator, a reminder for ground mechanics of the correct coolant mix. The Bordfunker's central rear canopy is the second type, with the small cutaway in the centre for the rear-firing machine gun, allowing the canopy to be fully closed.

LEFT: 2N+GC of the Gruppenstab of III./ZG 76. This machine also has '50% Glykol' stencilled on the radiator. This Bf 110 D carries a light upper surface camouflage, and the spinner tips and letter 'G', which has no outline to it, are in the Gruppenstab colour of green.

SKG 210 suffered the inevitable losses as it continued to carry out its lone *Zerstörer* assault on England. *Bordfunker Uffz.* Rolf Schilleng, a veteran of Battle of Britain days (with pilot *Uffz.* Balthasar Aretz, who had been Schilleng's regular pilot until he was wounded in action over London on 5 October 1940, and who had since moved on to a *Bf 110* reconnaissance unit) was lost over the North Sea on 12 May on a mission to attack Martlesham Heath airfield. Unusually for this time, his 2. *Staffel Bf 110*, coded S9+CK, carried a crew of three. In the afternoon of 31 May *I./SKG 210* took off for Lippstadt in preparation for the forthcoming Russian campaign. On 17 June the *Gruppe* finally moved to Radzyn airfield, west of Brest-Litovsk, from where it would commence its campaign against Russia.

II. Gruppe, meanwhile, had embarked upon what was a new venture for its crews: fighter-bomber training. Prior to the commencement of the Russian campaign, the *Gruppe* was based at Neumünster and Garz in May 1941. *Gruppenkommandeur* Rolf Kaldrack was not altogether happy with converting to the fighter-bomber role, and he always had on charge two *Bf 110*s: one a fighter-bomber, the other a pure fighter without bomb racks. "All the bombs and similar things do not pay" he once told Wolfgang Schenck, "you only get the biggest honours as a fighter".



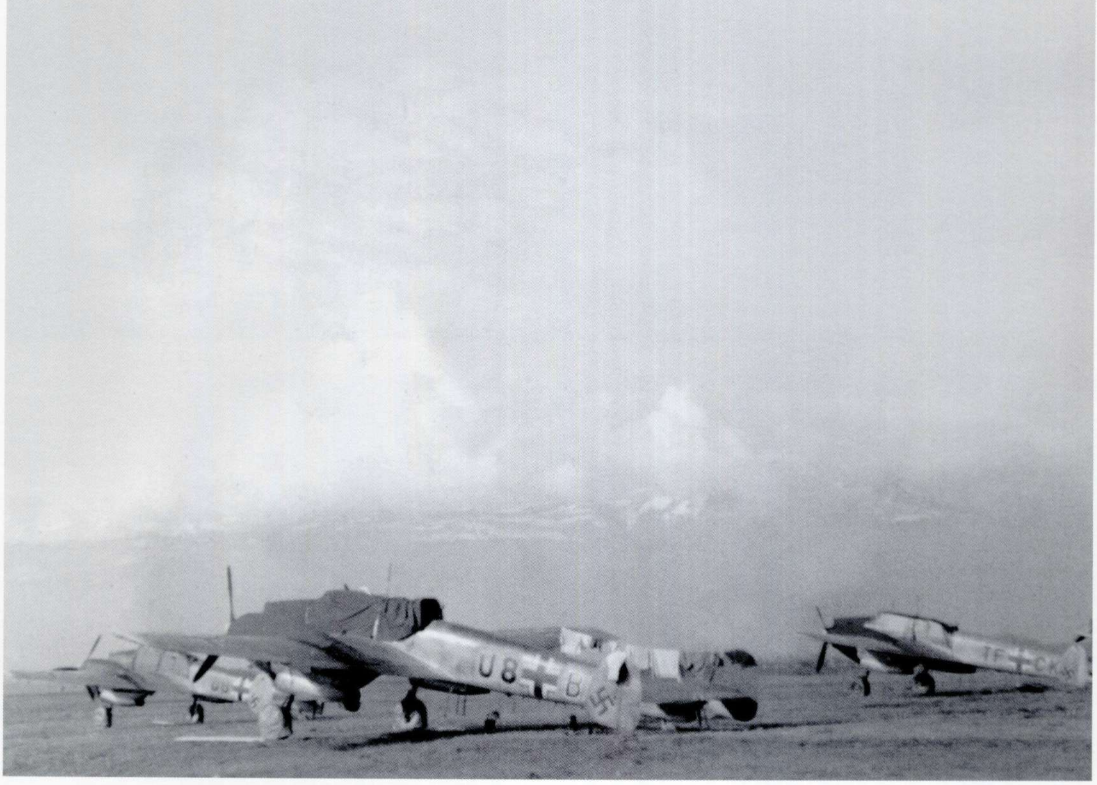
ABOVE: 2./SKG 210 Bf 110 after a heavy landing. Note the letter 'A' on the engine cowling on the ground, denoting the fitment of the DB 601 A engine. The strong contrast between the two camouflage colours on the wings would indicate the application of RLM 71 and 02.

I. and *II. Gruppen* met up in Lippstadt in the early part of June, where crews became acquainted with the new anti-personnel weapon, the SD2. These small devices were loaded under the wings and had to be dropped at low altitude, as they usually had a fuse of only two seconds. This ordnance proved unpopular with the crews of *SKG 210*, as there was a tendency for the aircraft dropping them to be damaged as they exploded beneath them.

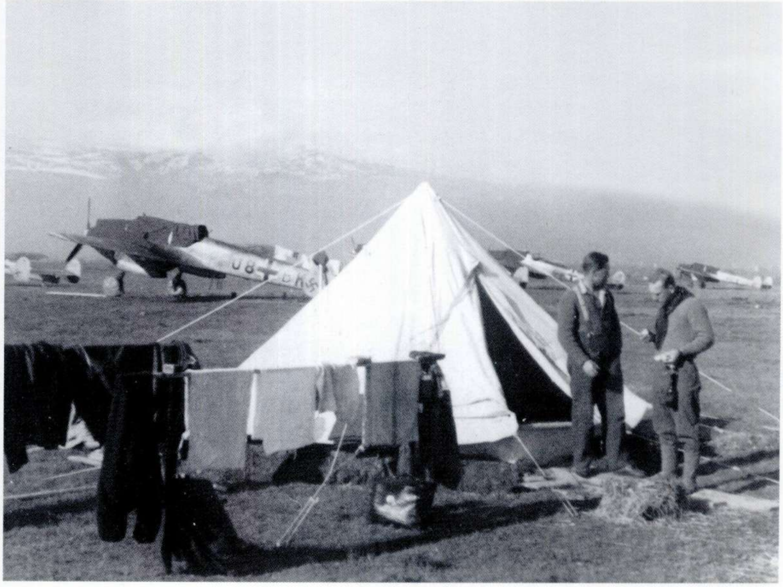
The Balkans campaign

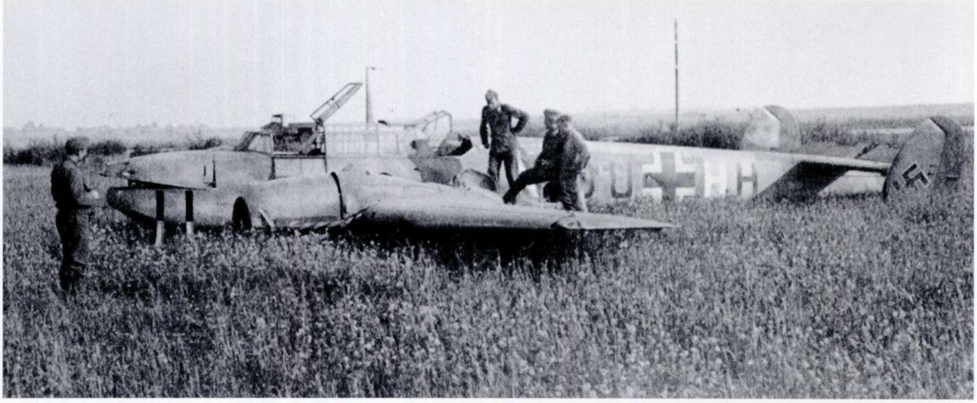
In early 1941, the political situation in the Balkans became unstable, and the dubious allegiance of certain countries in that region compelled Hitler to launch an invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece. The re-designation of *I.* and *II./ZG 26* as *I.* and *II./NJG 4* was suspended, and these two *Gruppen* formed part of the aerial support provided by the *Luftwaffe*. *7.(F)/LG 2,* with *Bf 110 C-5*s, also participated in the campaign. Some *Luftwaffe* units were already well-placed for the attack on Yugoslavia: units based in Rumania and Hungary under *Luftflotte 4* stood ready for the attack, and it was to this *Luftflotte* that *I./ZG 26* was attached. *VIII. Fliegerkorps* assembled the remainder of the attacking force, which included *II./ZG 26* and *7.(F)/LG 2*. Hostilities began on 6 April, with *I./ZG 26* providing escort to bombers in the northern sector, who undertook an attack on Belgrade that lasted over an hour. Encountering *Bf 109*s of the Yugoslavian Air Force, two enemy machines were claimed shot down, but the *Zerstörer* lost five machines. A telling statistic when considering the fact that combat-experienced *Bf 110* pilots were up against inexperienced pilots of the Yugoslav Air Force. In the south, *II./ZG 26* lost two *Bf 110*s in the first day's action. *III./ZG 26* also made a single, fleeting, appearance on the first day, claiming two Yugoslavian Air Force *Bf 109*s. The following day *III./ZG 26* transferred back to Sicily. The end of the first day showed that the resistance of the Yugoslavian air force was effectively at an end, and the *Zerstörer* units reverted to a ground-attack role, attacking ground targets in support of the advancing German troops. The vanquishing of Yugoslavian opposition followed, with the *Luftwaffe* free to roam the skies and pick off targets at will, and German forces were soon able to turn their full attention to the next objective.

The invasion of Greece occurred almost at the same time as the invasion of Yugoslavia, and inevitably, the weight, and tactical deployment, of German forces eventually resulted in their success. By the middle of April northern Greece was occupied by the Germans. British and Greek forces put up a spirited resistance, however, and this was shown in the major combat that occurred on 20 April when a force of *Bf 110*s from *II./ZG 26* tangled with RAF Hurricanes. In the ensuing combat, *II. Gruppe* lost two *Bf 110*s, but laid claim to five victories over the Hurricanes. Notable among the Hurricane losses was Squadron Leader Pattle of 33 Squadron, considered to be the highest scoring RAF pilot of the Second World War with a score of at least 40. As the *Luftwaffe* gained the upper hand, attacks on airfields increased, with *Bf 110*s operating in a strafing role. Such missions were not without danger, and losses were recorded during this phase of the campaign. British and Greek forces were gradually

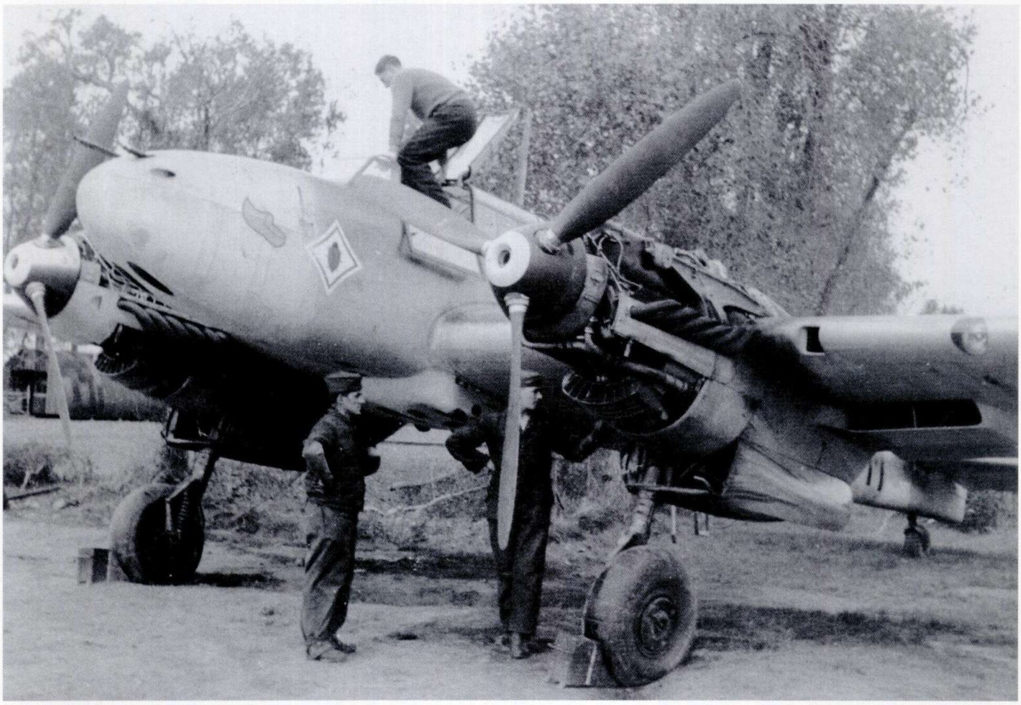


THIS PAGE: Three views of 2./ZG 26 Bf 110s during the Balkans campaign in the spring of 1941. Note the aerial being used as an impromptu washing line on U8+BK, and the tented accommodation alongside the aircraft.



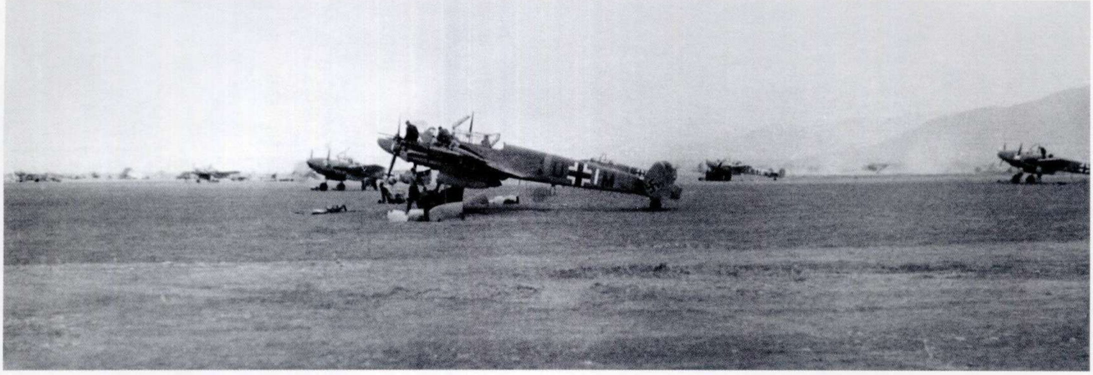


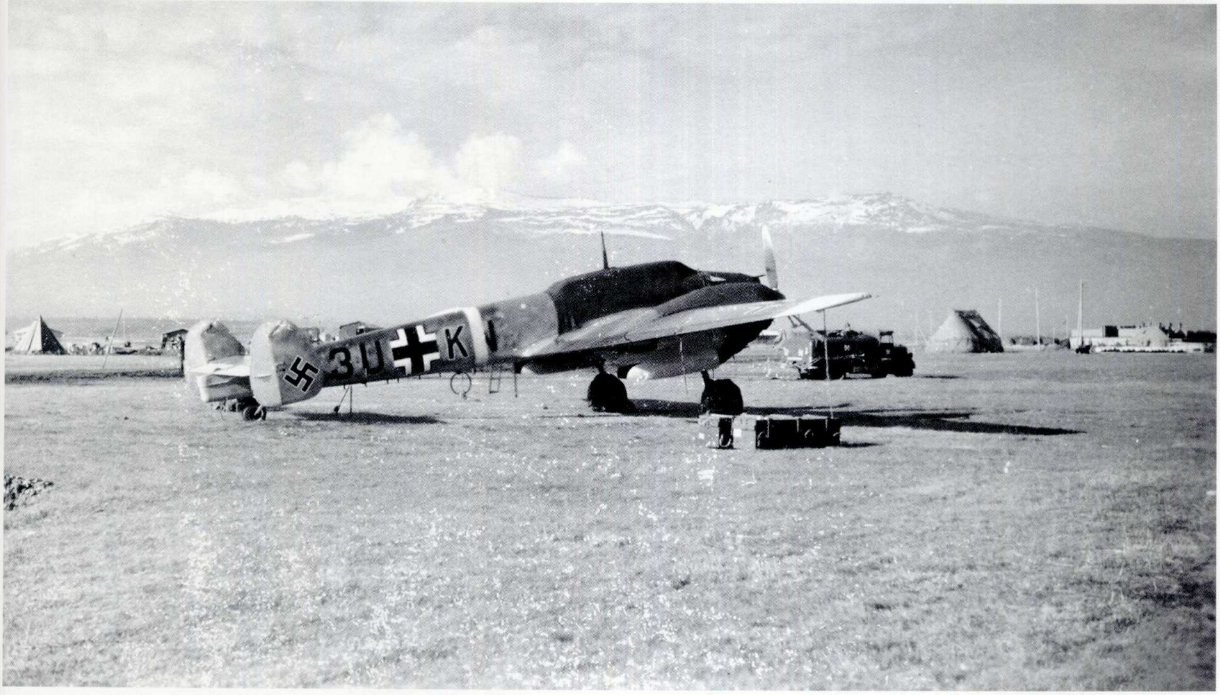
RIGHT: The pilot of this 1./ZG 26 Bf 110 E has made a good belly landing. The fuselage has a dense mottle applied, and the Staffel letter is white with no outline. Note the mottle applied to the inside of the starboard fin, and the rudders in an apparently darker colour than the fins.



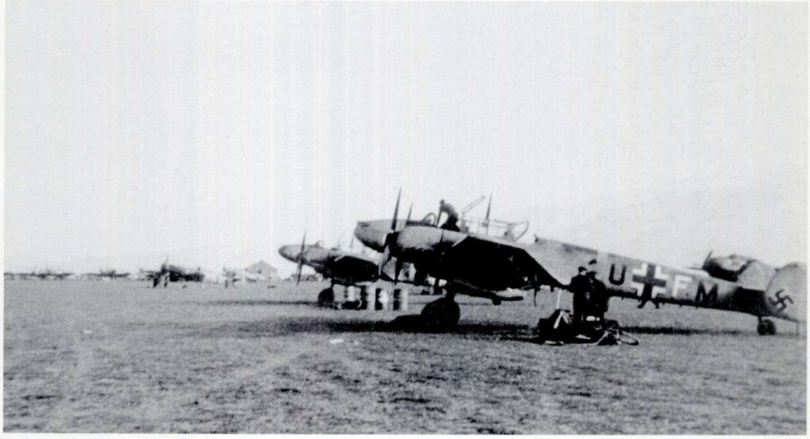
LEFT: This 4./ZG 26 Bf 110 D seen during the Balkans campaign has its spinner tips in the Staffel colour of white. The nose and rear fuselage are painted yellow, and interestingly, the clog emblem of II./ZG 26 and the ladybird emblem of III./ZG 26 are carried. Note the heavy oil streaks on the port undercarriage door.

BELOW: Nearest to the camera is 3U+IM of 4./ZG 26 showing the practice of painting the yellow fuselage band over the unit code. This was unique to II./ZG 26 in the Balkans campaign.

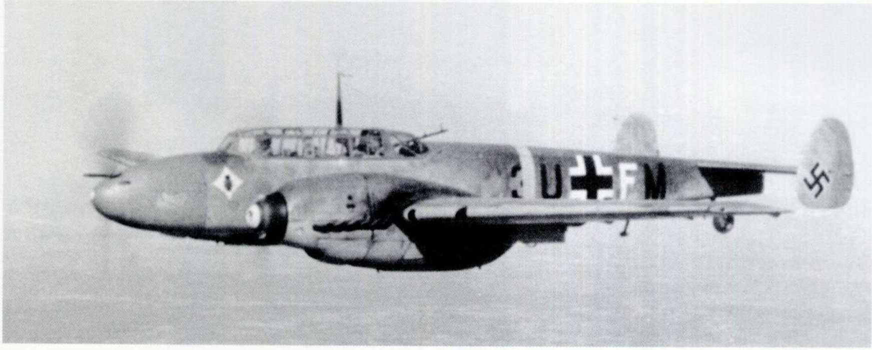




ABOVE: 3U+KN of 5./ZG 26 clearly shows the distinctive tactical markings applied to II./ZG 26 machines during the Balkans campaign. The yellow band is applied just aft of the wing root. Wingtips, rear fuselage and rudders also carry yellow tactical markings. The individual aircraft letter 'K' is black with a thin white outline. The complete canopy and the mainwheel tyres are protected from the heat.

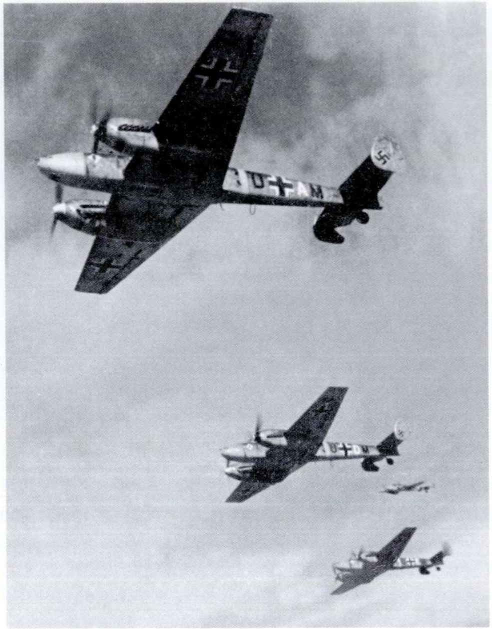


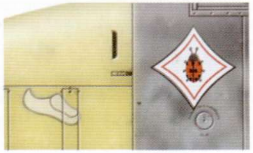
RIGHT: ZG 26 machines during the Balkans campaign.

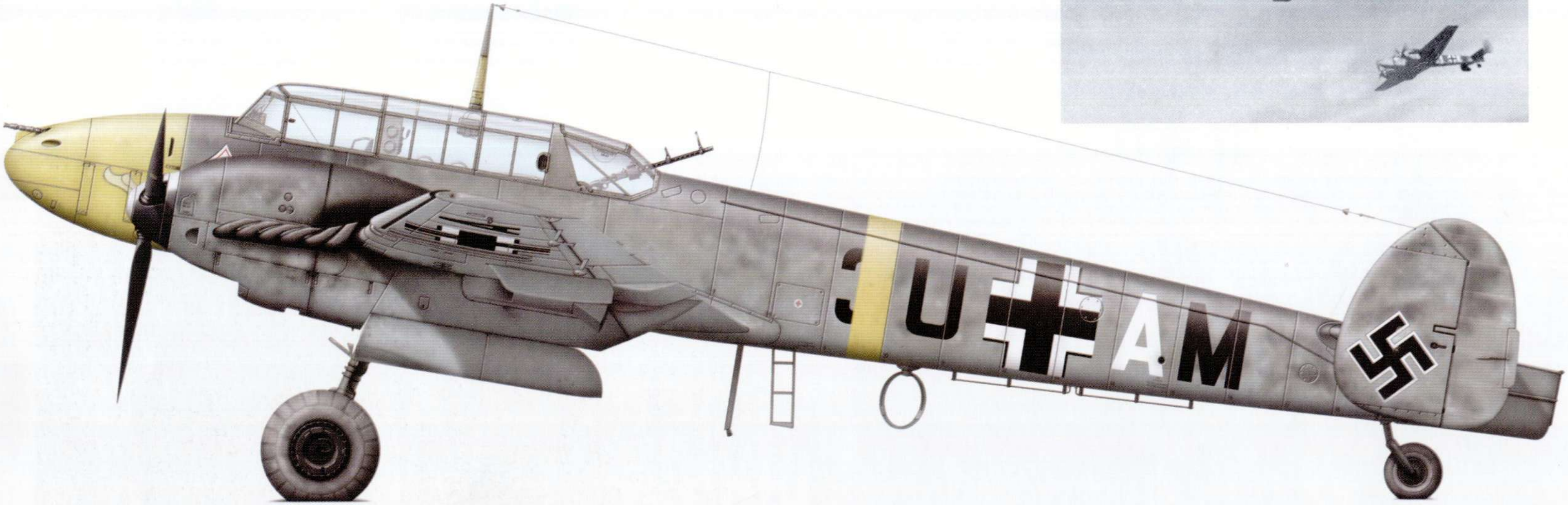


LEFT: Bf 110 D, 3U+FM, in flight showing the extended rear fuselage and the yellow band partly covering the unit code. The yellow clog of II. Gruppe on the nose has been masked while the yellow tactical nose marking (in a different shade of yellow) was applied. This aircraft, like one shown in a previous photograph, also carries the III. Gruppe ladybird emblem. The spinner tips and individual aircraft letter are in white. Note that this Bf 110 does not have yellow wingtips.

3U+AM, 3U+DM and 3U+EM all display the yellow fuselage band covering the unit code, the yellow nose, and the II. Gruppe clog and III. Gruppe ladybird emblems.

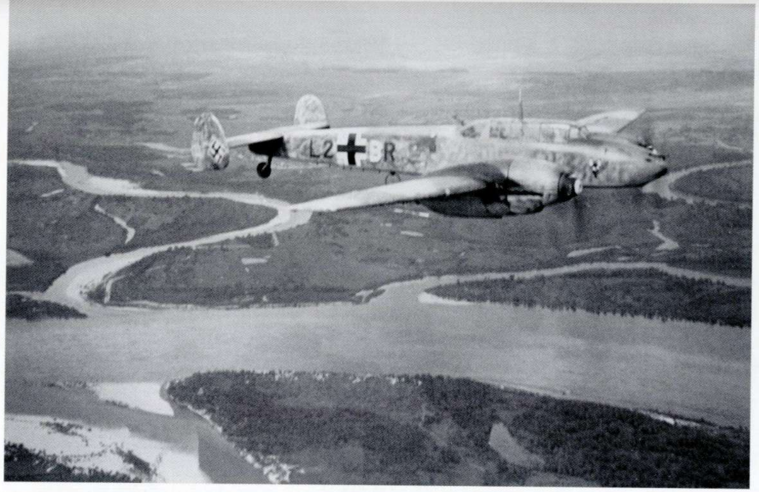




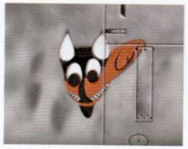


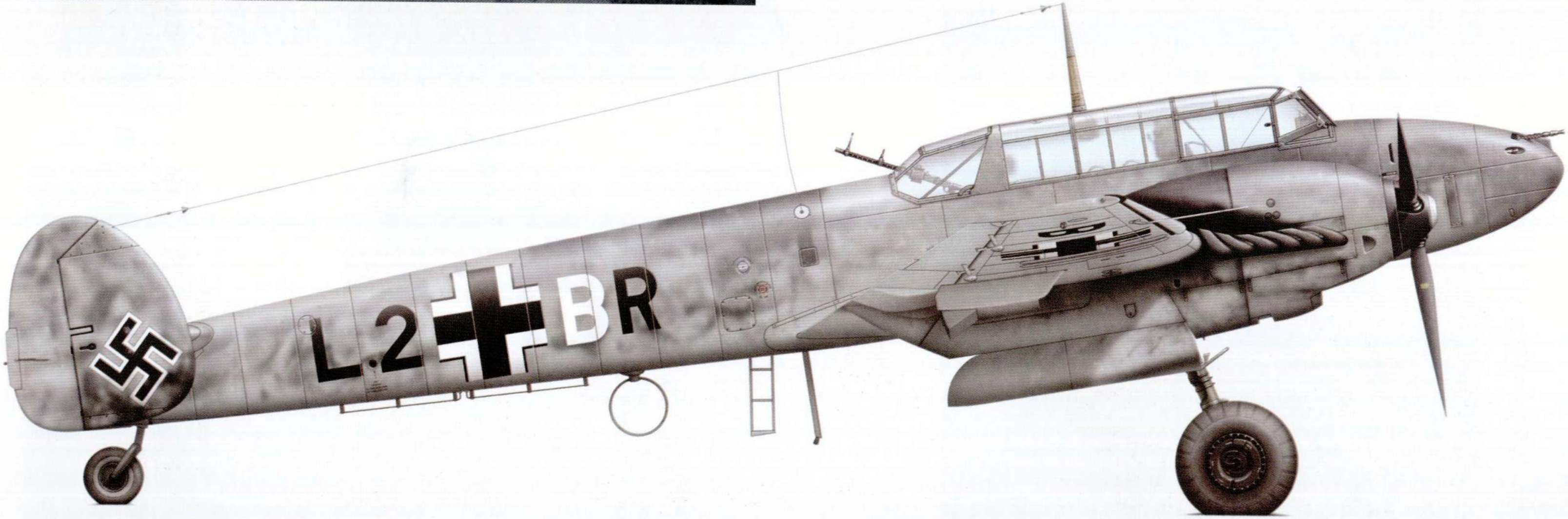
Messerschmitt Bf 110 E, 3U+AM, of 4./ZG 26

Bf 110 E, 3U+AM, of 4./ZG 26 in the Balkans campaign displays the extended rear fuselage that was retained on the early 'E' variants. Unique to II./ZG 26 during this period, the yellow fuselage band covers the first character of the unit code on the port side. A yellow nose, in a slightly different shade to the II. Gruppe clog emblem, and the III. Gruppe ladybird emblem are also evident. No pilot's armoured windscreen is fitted.



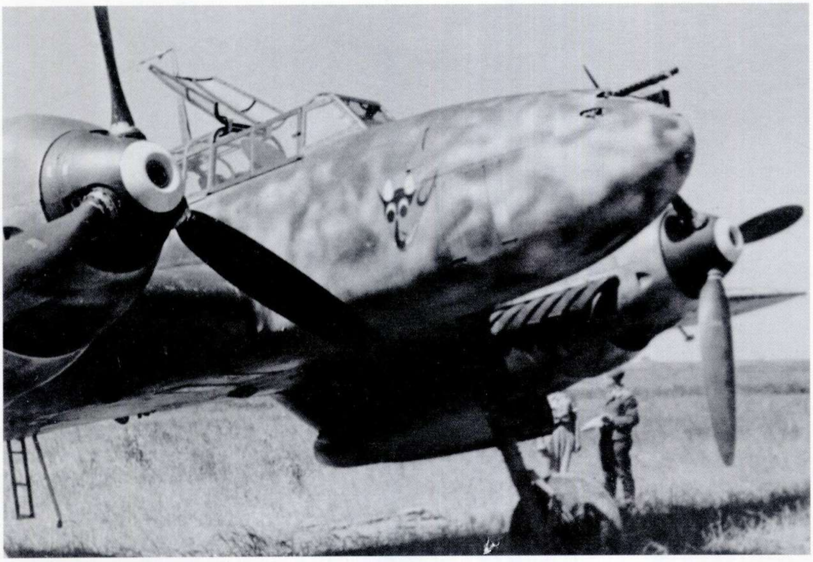
L2+BR of 7.(F)/LG 2 carries a heavy mottle on the fuselage, fins and rudders. The wings show a high contrast between the camouflage colours, almost certainly RLM 71 and 02. The letter 'B' is in the Staffel colour of white, and the Staffel's devil's head emblem can be seen on the nose.





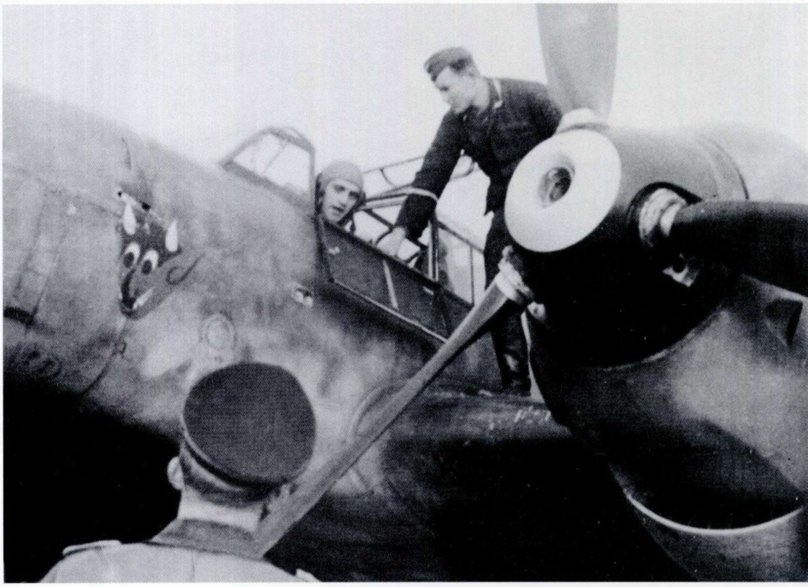
Messerschmitt Bf 110 E-3, L2+BR, of 7.(F)/LG 2

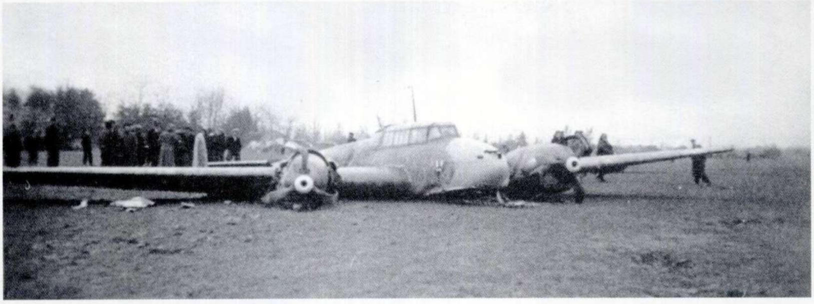
This Bf 110 E-3, L2+BR, of 7.(F)/LG 2 shows a high contrast between the two upper surface camouflage colours. An armoured windscreen is fitted, and the individual aircraft letter, B, has no outline to it.



LEFT: Bf 110 E of 7.(F)/LG 2 showing the Staffel emblem on the starboard nose.

RIGHT: This photograph is quite rare in that it shows a pilot of 7.(F)/LG 2 in the cockpit of his Bf 110. The white spinner tip and Staffel emblem are seen to good effect in this view.





LEFT: The pilot of this 7.(F)/LG 2 Bf 110 has made a good belly landing. The yellow tactical marking on the nose has been adjusted so as not to cover the Staffel emblem.

forced further and further south, all the time providing the *Luftwaffe* with the opportunity to carry out attacks on the retreating troops. One such situation occurred on 27 April when *Bf 110*s of *I./ZG 26* caught a large body of troops in the open and were able to carry out a devastating attack, but not without casualties, however, as two *Bf 110*s crash-landed following this action. With the closing of the occupation of Greece, attention now turned to an island in close proximity to its southern coast.

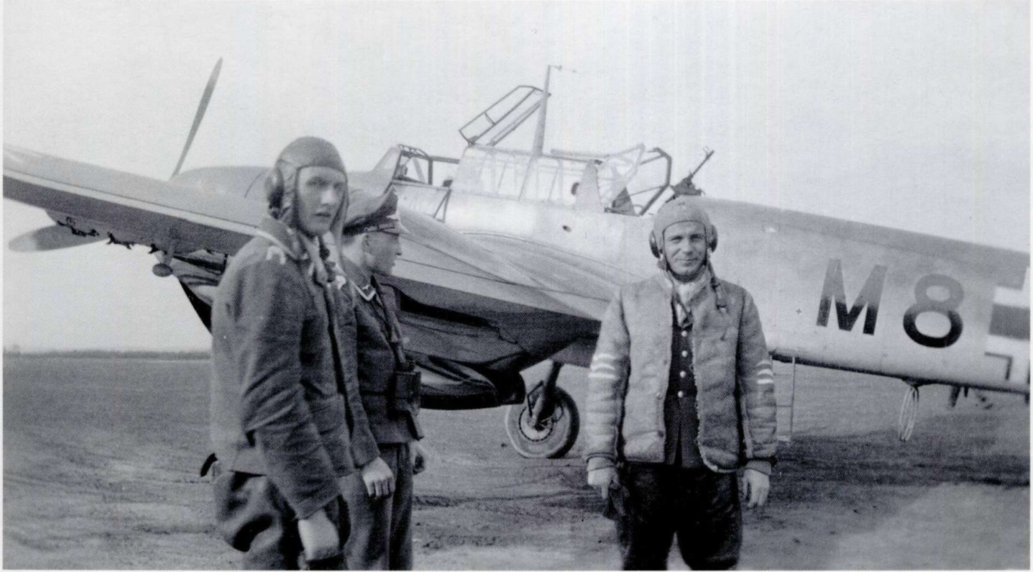
Crete

By the end of April the island of Crete was becoming increasingly vulnerable to German attack, and the *Zerstörer* contingent available to support the eventual attack on the island was supplemented when *II./ZG 76* was transferred from northern Europe to Argos on 7 May and came under the operational command of *VIII. Fliegerkorps*. The 'Sharksmouth' *Bf 110*s were soon in action.

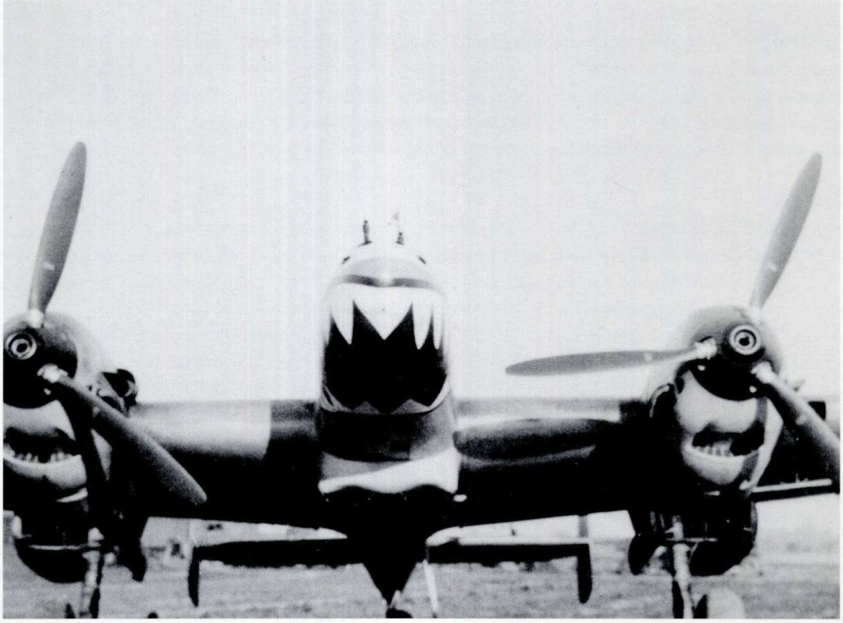
One of the unusual features of *4./ZG 76* was the manner in which the individual aircraft letters were allocated. The letters were taken from the initial letter of the pilot's surname. So, *Fw.* Brandstetter flew M8+BM; *Lt.* Martin Drewes flew M8+DM; *Lt.* Eisenach flew M8+EM, *Lt.* Fröhling M8+FM; *Fw.* Hennies M8+HM, and *Fw.* Piwarz M8+PM. The practice was occasionally followed in the other *Staffeln*; *Ofw.* Spitzner flying M8+SP, for example.

In the early days of May the *Luftwaffe* undertook a series of bombing raids to soften up the defences of Crete. *Bf 110*s were active in attacking ground targets and Royal Navy ships in the waters around Crete. However such low level missions always carried a high degree of risk, and among the losses was a veteran pilot from the Battle of Britain. *Oblt.* Sophus Baagoe of *5./ZG 26* and his *Bordfunker* were killed when their *Bf 110* was shot down into the sea. Doubt surrounds the actual victor, with ground defences and a Gloster Gladiator pilot both laying claims to the victory. Sophus Baagoe had claimed 14 victories at the time of his death: two in the Western campaign and 12 in the Battle of Britain. He was to be awarded the *Ritterkreuz* posthumously a month later.

The offensive was not all one way, however, and Bristol Beaufighters carried out an effective raid on German airfields on the Greek mainland, destroying three *Bf 110*s and causing damage to many more dispersed around the airfields. On 20 May, German paratroops descended on Crete, and the full scale invasion of the island commenced. The *Bf 110* units flew escort for the lumbering transport aircraft, and also carried out attacks on defending enemy emplacements. On the following day, another luminary of the Battle of Britain met his death when the *Gruppenkommandeur* of *I./ZG 26*, *Hptm.* Wilhelm Makrocki, who had been awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 6 October 1940, was lost. It was believed that his *Bf 110 D-3*, U8+AB, W.Nr. 4357, was hit by exploding debris from a small ship that he had carried out a low level attack on, and his *Bf 110* crashed out of control into the sea. What was unusual was that his *Bordfunker*, *Hptm.* Eisgruber, was of relatively high rank.

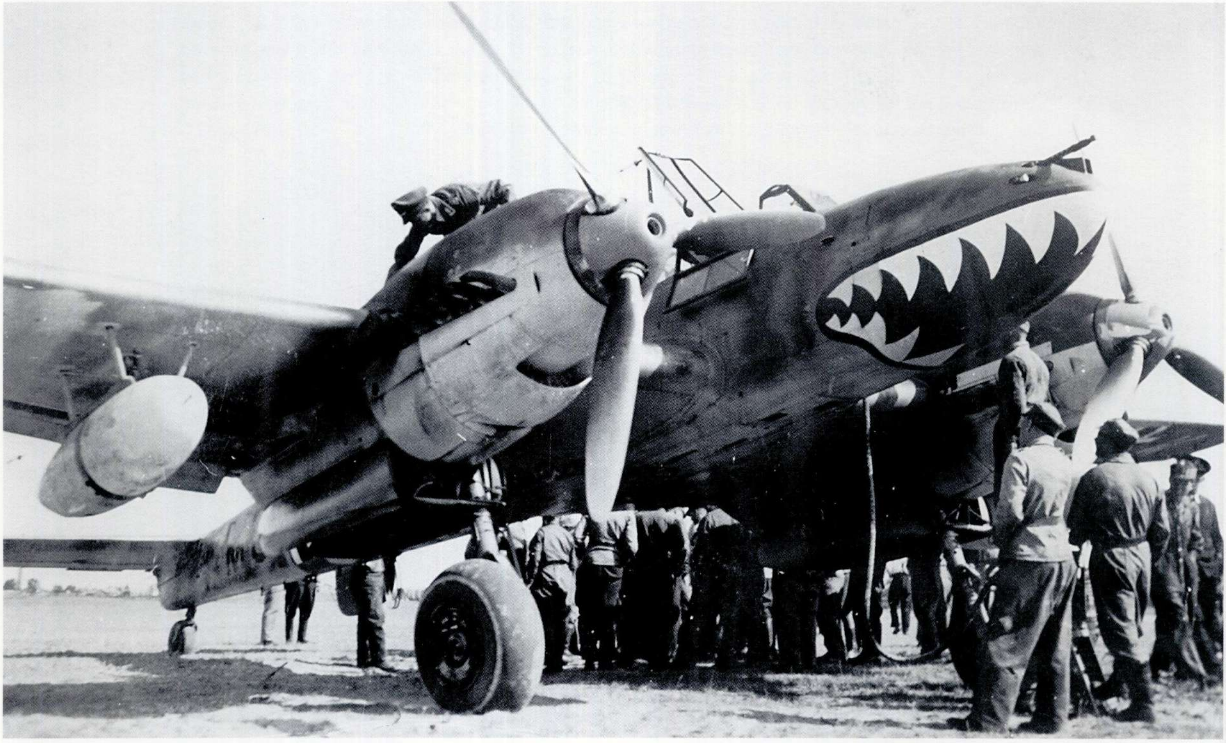


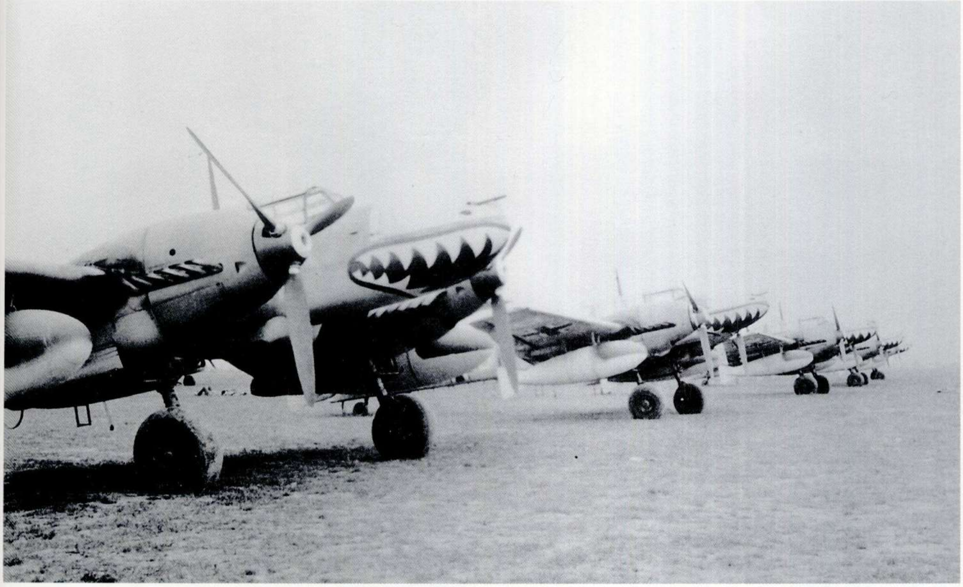
LEFT: An unknown Oberleutnant poses with two Unteroffiziere in front of a Bf 110 of II./ZG 76. The cable along the top of the fuselage and the under wing bomb rack identify the aircraft as an 'E' variant. Note the 'N' on the port engine cowling, denoting the fitment of the DB 601 N engine. Heavy staining can be seen on the port undercarriage door.



ABOVE: This Bf 110 D of II./ZG 76 carries the famous 'Sharksmouth' emblem of the Gruppe and a white machine guns cowling. Of interest is the asymmetrical application of the Sharksmouth. Note the bomb rack under the fuselage.

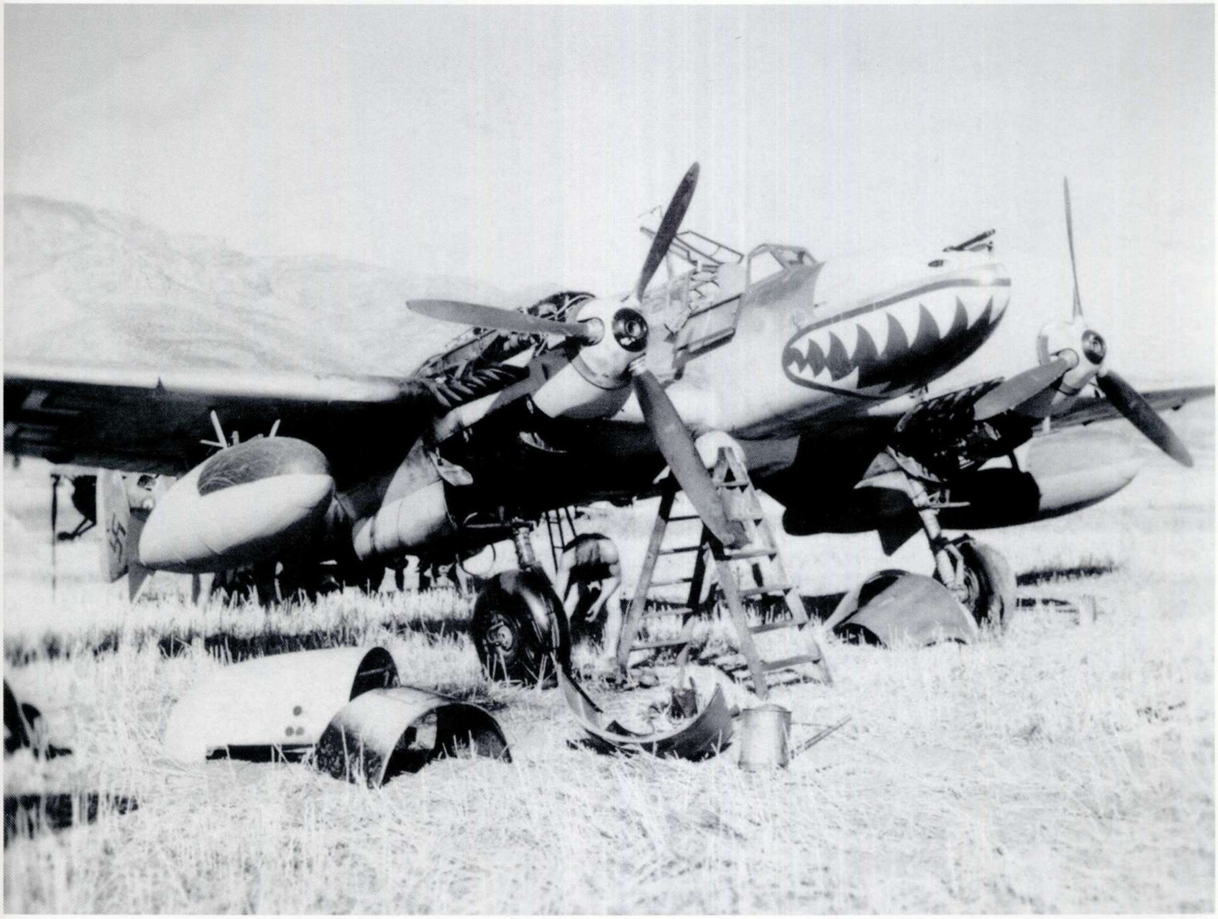
BELOW: Bf 110 E of II./ZG 26 fitted with under-wing supplementary fuel tanks, but lacking a bomb rack.

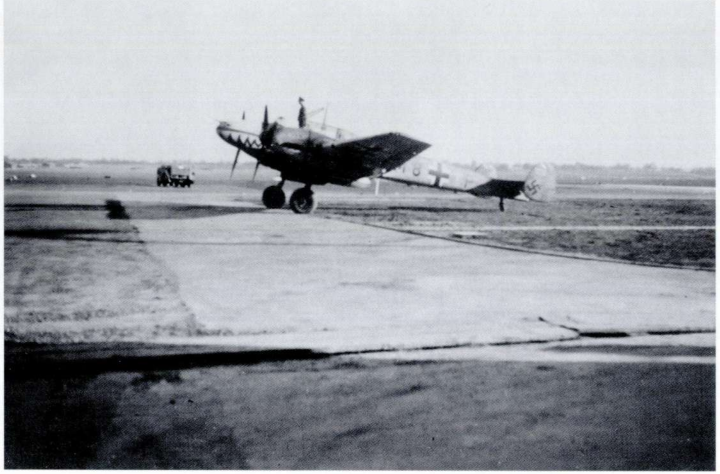




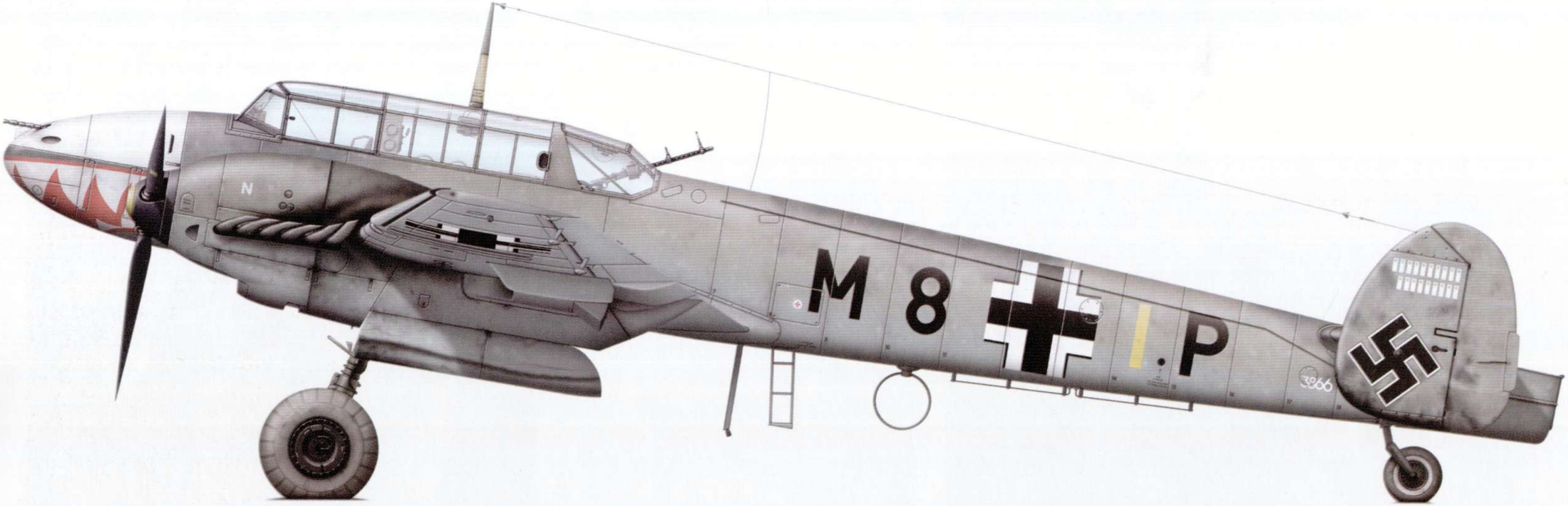
LEFT: A line-up of II./ZG 76 Bf 110s with supplementary fuel tanks under the wings and white engine cowlings.

BELOW: Bf 110 E of II./ZG 76 carrying under-wing fuel tanks and a bomb rack. Of particular interest is the fact that the rear of the Sharksmouth emblem slightly overlaps the Erprobungsgruppe 210 emblem. The likely explanation is that this aircraft initially saw service with Erprobungsgruppe 210 and suffered damage. Sent to a repair facility, it was then re-issued to II./ZG 76, who did not bother to remove the Erprobungsgruppe 210 emblem, but simply applied its own without regard to the previous emblem. Note that light areas of the propeller spinners have been given an application of mottle.





Hans-Joachim Jabs stands on the port wing root of his Bf 110 E-1, W.Nr. 3866, which carries 19 white victory bars on the port fin. The individual aircraft letter 'I' was yellow with no outline.



Messerschmitt Bf 110 E-1, M8+IP, II./ZG 76

This Bf 110 E-1 has the extended rear fuselage of the early 'E' production batch. A white machine gun cowling became prevalent in the 'Haifischgruppe' during 1941. The 'N' on the engine cowling signifies the fitment of DB 601 N engines. Hans-Joachim Jabs' daytime score of 19 victories can be seen in the white victory bars on the fin.

As the month of May progressed, the likelihood of a German victory became a stark reality for the Allied army on the island, and plans were made to evacuate the remaining forces by sea. The Royal Navy undertook its task admirably, but suffered the loss of two cruisers and six destroyers in constant *Luftwaffe* attacks while ferrying Allied troops to Egypt. For the *Luftwaffe*, the victory was tempered by the fact that over one third of the *Ju 52/3m* transports had been lost, many shot out of the sky by Allied guns that had not been silenced during the softening-up process prior to 20 May.

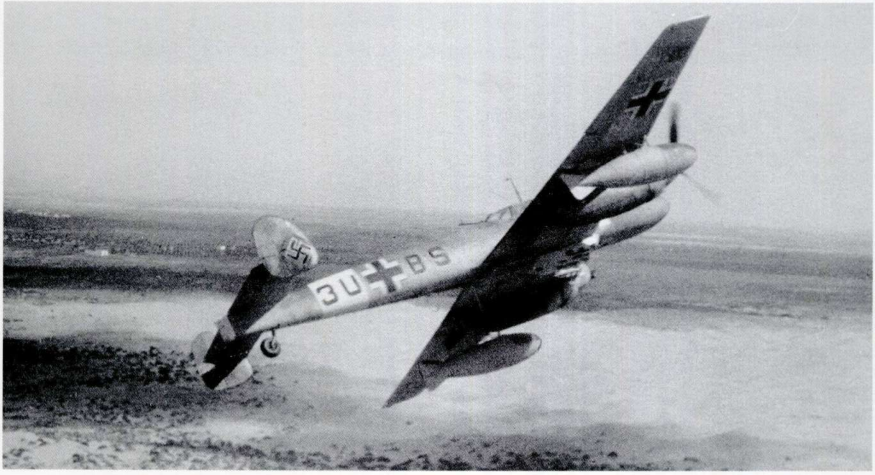
Interlude in Iraq

With action concluding in the brief southern European campaign, *II./ZG 76* returned to northern Europe, but *4. Staffel* remained in the Mediterranean, as it was earmarked for a special operation. Political unrest in Iraq resulted in British intervention to protect political interests there, and the Germans were moved to send an aerial detachment to support a rebel uprising by opposing the British land forces and attacking the airfields occupied by them. Under the command of *Oberst* Werner Junck, '*Sonderkommando Junck*' was formed, comprising one bomber *Staffel* (*4./KG 4*), a *Zerstörer Staffel*, (*4./ZG 76*), and several transport aircraft. The *Bf 110*s were repainted in Iraqi markings, but they retained the large Sharksmouth emblem on their noses. By the second week of May, the *Zerstörer* aircraft had staged eastwards and had settled in Mosul. Missions were soon being undertaken, mainly attacking ground targets, but the attrition was such that over the following days the strength of the *Staffel* was gradually diminished. By the end of the month there were no serviceable *Bf 110*s available, and the detachment of pilots was evacuated by transport aircraft. The final tally of 19 *Bf 110*s and *He 111*s lost was a poor return for claims of two Gladiators shot down. To be fair to these figures, the role of the *Bf 110*s was also that of ground-attack, and it is not known exactly how successful they were in that role, but the fact that they undoubtedly hit their ground targets on many occasions may go some way to redress the balance.

The RAF recovered a crash landed *Bf 110*, and with spare parts from other abandoned *Bf 110*s, managed to restore it to flying condition. This *Bf 110 E-1*, W.Nr. 4035, had the name 'THE BELLE OF BERLIN' painted on its nose, and it was test flown at Habbaniyah in Iraq, and later at Heliopolis in Egypt. However a second belly-landing en route to South Africa finally put paid to any further flying time for this aircraft.

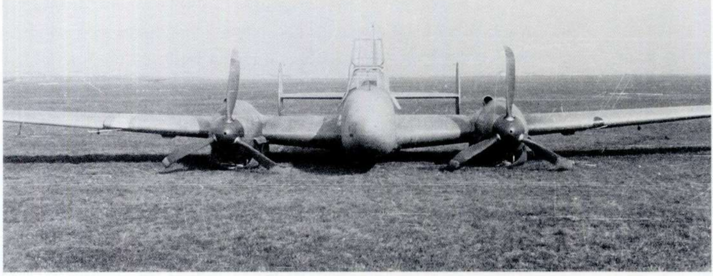
African dawn

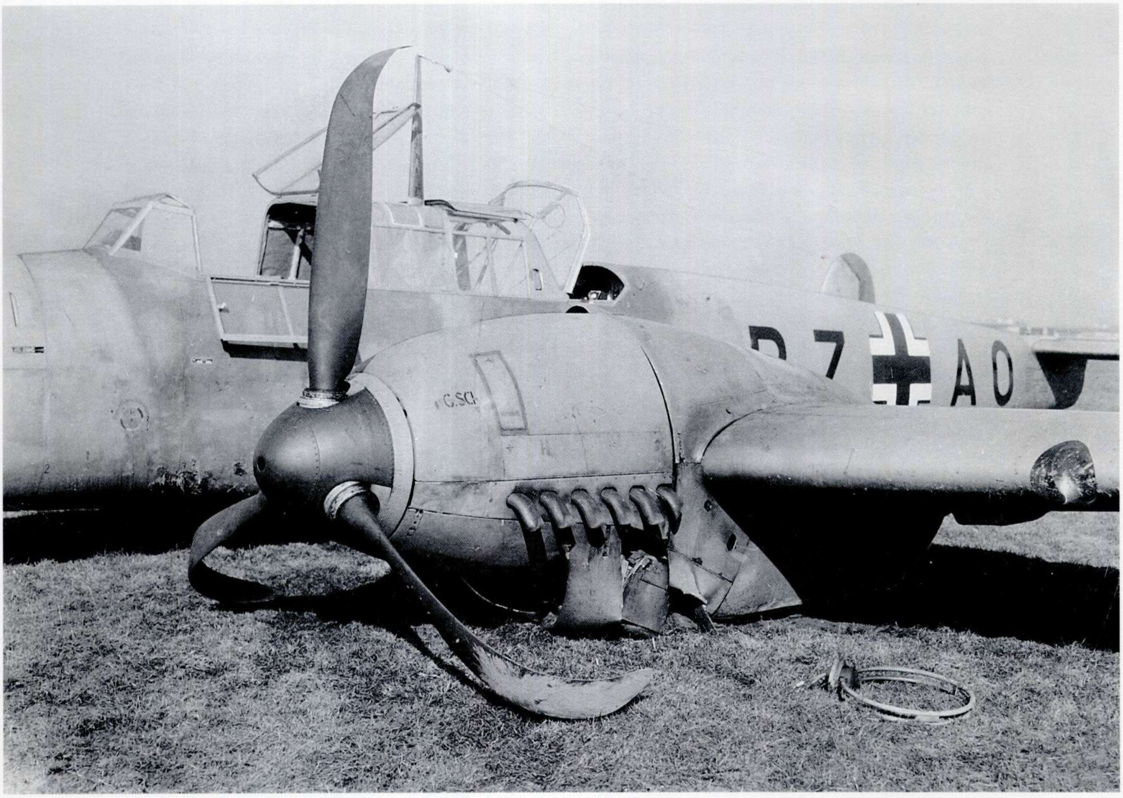
Mussolini's drive for military glory in Africa in late 1940 ran into unexpected problems when Italian forces were driven back west across Cyrenaica in the Libyan desert. The situation was such that reinforcement by German forces became a necessity. Among the *Luftwaffe* units sent to the African theatre was *Major* Karl Kaschka's *III./ZG 26*. It would be a long haul for the *Gruppe*, as it would remain in this region for two years and witness, and play a supporting role to, the fluctuating fortunes of Rommel's *Afrika Korps*. Initially the *Bf 110*s of the Gruppe still carried the European theatre style camouflage, but as the campaign progressed they appeared in desert camouflage, in line with other units.

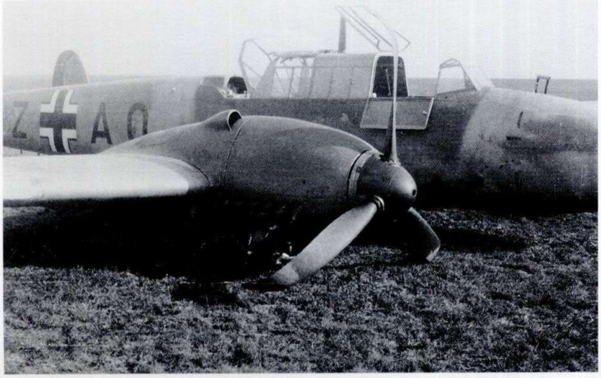


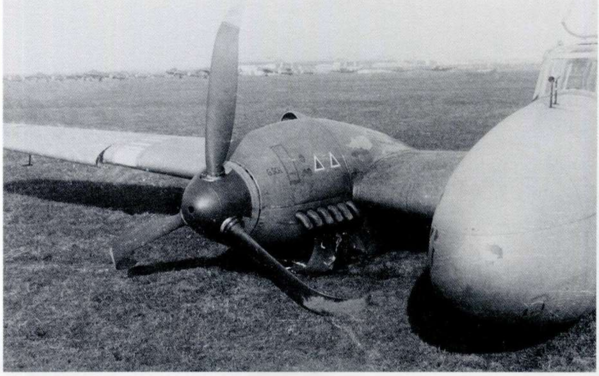
LEFT: Bf 110 E, 3U+BS of 8./ZG 26 fitted with a fuselage bomb rack and under wing fuel tanks. The broad white band of the African theatre, and white tactical marking on the rear of the fuselage can be seen.

THIS PAGE: Four views of a Bf 110 B of a training unit at Prague-Rusin airfield in mid-1941. There are some unusual features on this Bf 110. The twin aerials come out of a single attachment to the cockpit aerial mast; normally on the 'B' and 'C-1' variants the two aerials come directly from the mast. The central section of the cockpit canopy appears to have its window panels painted in a dark colour, as the photographs show no fitment of the curtains usually used for blind flying practice. No machine gun armament is carried in the upper nose, and there is what appears to be a small sighting device ahead of the pilot's windscreen. On the starboard wing, outboard of the engine cowling, there are a series of small white rectangles up to the leading edge of the wing, the purpose of which are not known.









In March 1941 German ground forces under Rommel began to push the Allies back from the territory they had earlier taken from the Italians, and ultimately they were returned to their December 1940 starting point. This fluctuation across mainly open ground would become a feature of the desert war, with airborne units following the flow of battle. The *Bf 110* was ideally suited to long-range escort duties for transport aircraft as well as bombers in such a theatre of battle. Another vital role for the *Zerstörer* was the protection of shipping lanes, so vital to the safe delivery of supplies to the ground and air forces in Africa, as well as attacking Allied shipping when found. Another role for which it was well-suited (given *Erprobungsgruppe 210*'s relative success in the previous year) was that of ground-attack. The *Bf 110 E*s that the *Gruppe* were being equipped with were fitted with bomb racks under the fuselage and both wings for such a purpose.

Given its harbour facilities, Tobruk became the fulcrum of the African theatre of operations as the year 1941 wore on. With *7.* and *9. Staffeln* of *ZG 26* based in Sicily and Crete respectively during the summer, *8. Staffel* was most likely to encounter Allied formations, and this is reflected in the victory claims between May and August, for which *8. Staffel* was the only claimant to success. Most of the aerial action took place around Sidi Barrani. Among the variety of Allied aircraft encountered were Hurricanes, Curtiss Tomahawks and Maryland bombers.

Ofw. Richard Heller of *8./ZG 26* was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 21 August when his victory tally stood at 11, having claimed the *III. Gruppe*'s 200th victory earlier in the month. Heller continued to fly with *III./ZG 26* throughout the mid-war years, and was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *2./JG 10* in June 1944. He was killed in action on 5 April 1945.

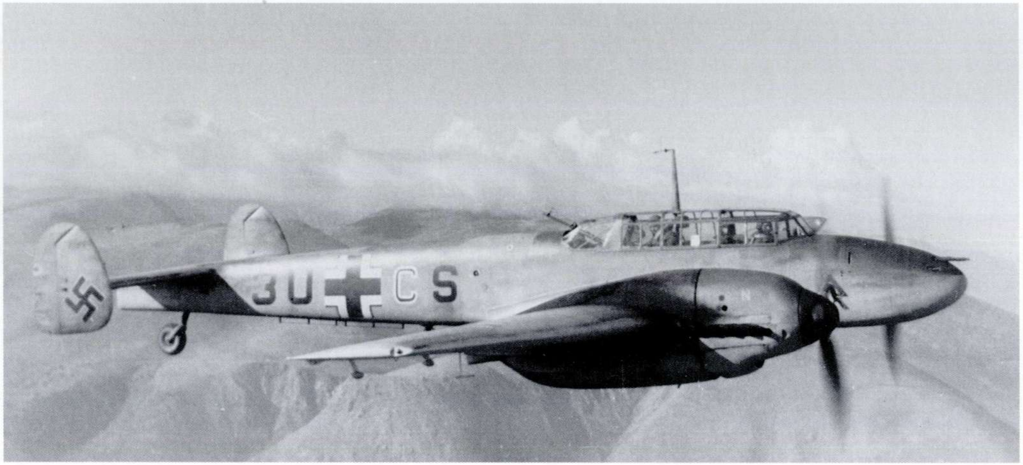
Rommel's advance eventually came to a halt, and the expected counter-attack from Allied ground forces took place in the early part of November under the code name 'Operation Crusader', the main thrust being to re-take Cyrenaica. Aerial activity was intense, and even a *Ritterkreuzträger* was not immune from being shot down. *Ofw.* Heller suffered that fate on 24 November when confronted by a superior force of Tomahawk fighters who made sure their quarry did not escape. On this occasion Heller managed to belly-land his damaged *Bf 110* and returned to his unit. However worse was to follow when, on 4 December, *Gruppenkommandeur Major* Karl Kaschka was shot down. His successor, *Hptm.* Thomas Steinberger lasted but a short time; on 24 December he was lost on a ferry flight. *Hptm.* Georg Christl became the third *Gruppenkommandeur* of *III./ZG 26* in a matter of weeks and would fare better than his predecessors, surviving the war.

Inevitably, the 'Crusader' offensive drew to a close, bringing down the curtain on mixed success for the *Zerstörer* of *III./ZG 26* in the African theatre.

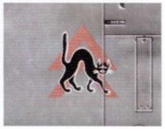
The Invasion of Russia

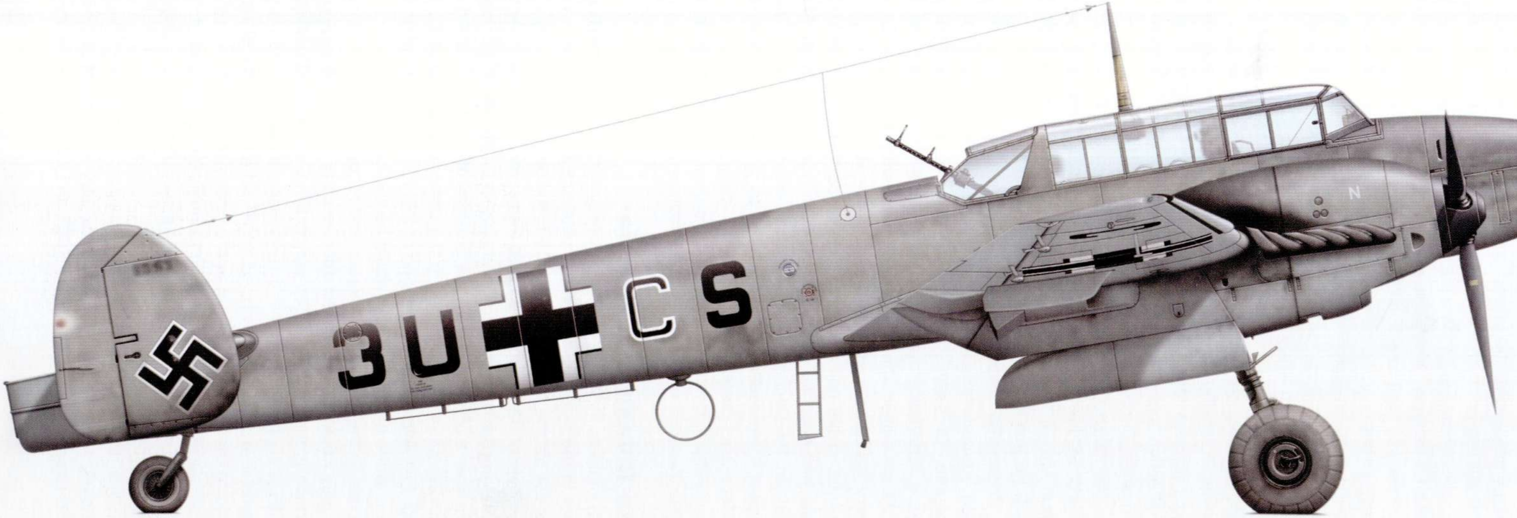
With matters in southern Europe finally stabilised, although Malta would ultimately prove to be a thorn in the side of German attempts to fully control the waters of the Mediterranean, the scene was set for the *Luftwaffe* to finally mobilise and get its units in position for the attack on Russia. The scale of the proposed assault was such that German planning legislated for an attack on three fronts: northern, central and southern. The sole *Zerstörer Staffel* operating initially on the northern front was *1.(Z)/JG 77*, with the addition of the small *Geschwaderstab* of *ZG 76* in the area. The main *Zerstörer* units included in the Order of Battle for the attack were the four *Gruppen*, *I.* and *II. SKG 210* and *I.* and *II. Gruppen* of *ZG 26*. All four *Gruppen* were initially allocated to the central front. While their initial role would be the assault on Russian airfields to destroy as many enemy aircraft on the ground as possible and render the airfields unserviceable for aircraft to operate out of, they would also be called upon to carry out a multiplicity of tasks in support of the advancing German ground forces. Troop concentrations, heavily fortified positions, communication lines and centres, such as road transports carrying supplies to the front line and the rail network which also served in a similar capacity, all came within the ambit of targets for the *Bf 110* units to attack. Allied to those units involved in the offensive side of German operations, there were also several reconnaissance units flying the reconnaissance versions of the *Bf 110*. These units gave sterling service to the main fighting forces, yet theirs is an untold story, and is likely never to be comprehensively told.

Prior to the start of the Russian campaign the *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 26*, *Hptm.* Ralph von Rettberg, was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* after his completion of 100 missions. He would later move on to be *Geschwaderkommodore* of *ZG 2*, and would serve out the war in staff positions.



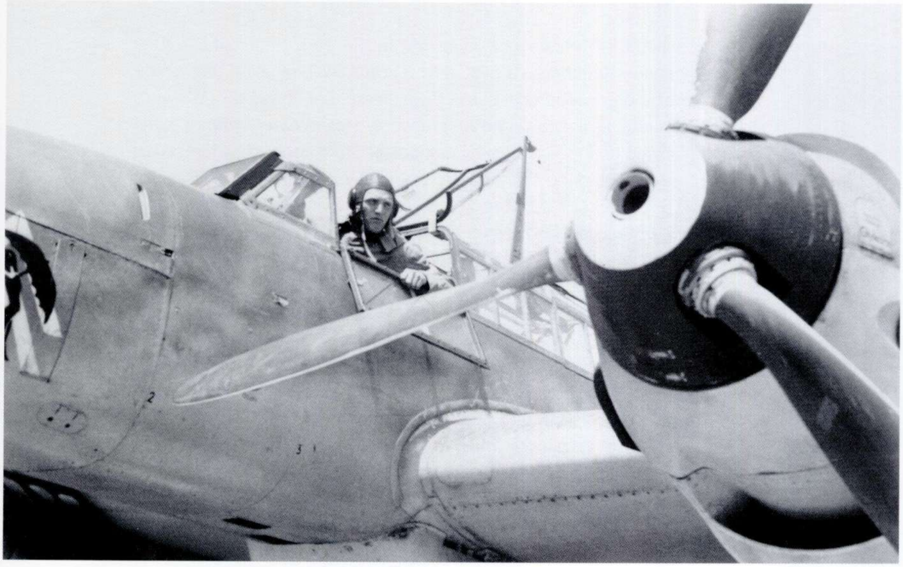
Bf 110 D, 3U+CS of 8./ZG 26 carries the later Staffel emblem of a black cat against a background of two red chevrons. The 'N' on the engine cowling denotes the fitment of the DB 601 N engine.



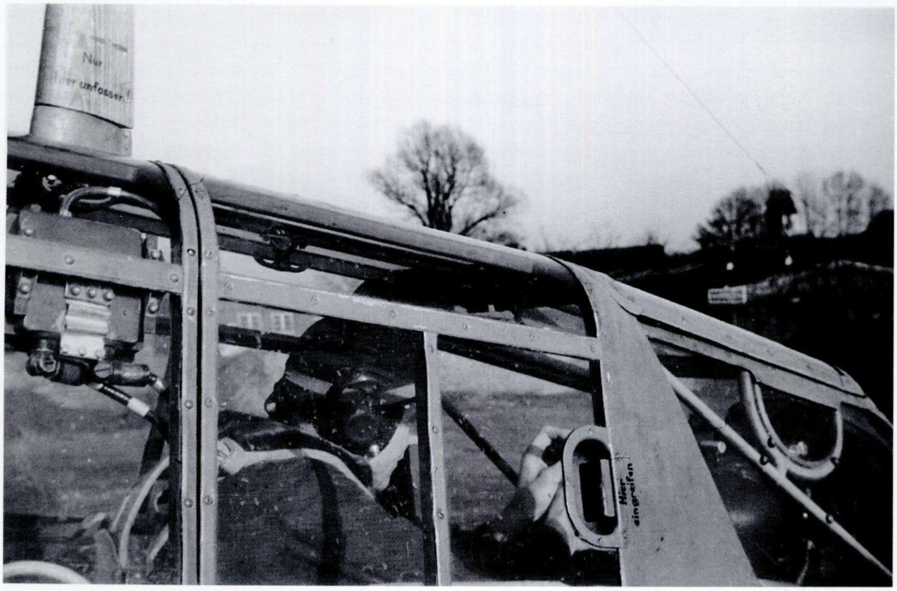


Messerschmitt Bf 110, 3U+CS, of 8./ZG 26

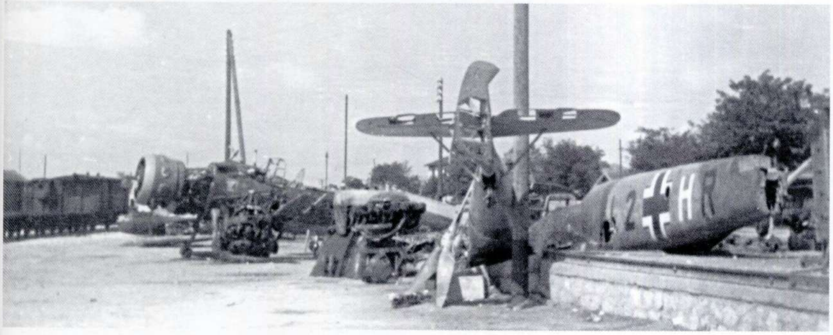
The extended rear fuselage, but lack of an air inlet on the nose, identifies this Bf 110, 3U+CS of 8./ZG 26, as a 'D' variant. The fuselage sides appear to carry an even spray of the upper surface camouflage rather than any mottle.



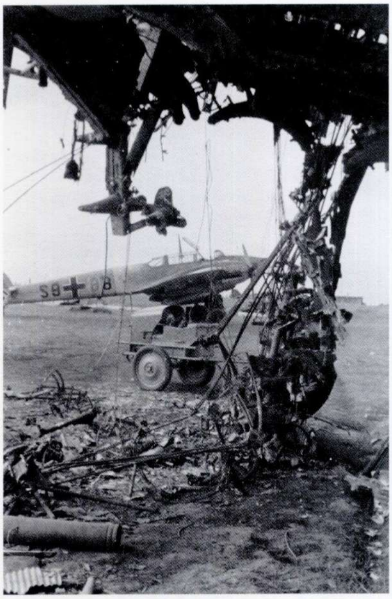
LEFT: An unknown pilot of 7./ZG 26 prepares for a mission. Note the 7. Staffel emblem on the nose, the armoured windscreen, spinner tip in the Staffel colour of white and the angle of dive line on the lowered pilot's window.



RIGHT: A close-up of the rear canopy of the Bf 110, showing the hand grip containing a lock mechanism to open, and also, secure the rear access panel by which the Bordfunker gained access to the rear cockpit compartment.



LEFT: Taken at Larissa railway sidings in August 1941, L2+HR of 7.(F)/LG 2 rests among other Luftwaffe wrecks. Of particular interest is the fact that it carries solid two-tone camouflage down the fuselage sides, the strong contrast suggesting RLM 71 and 02 as the likely colours.



ABOVE: Bf 110 E, S9+BB, of the Gruppenadjutant of I./SKG 210. A yellow Russian theatre band can be seen aft of the wing root. The early style fuselage cross is carried, a feature of many I./SKG 210 aircraft. The individual aircraft letter 'B' is in the Gruppenstab colour of green with a thin black outline. The Bordfunker's rear central canopy panel has been removed, a practice that originated with the unit's predecessor, Erprobungsgruppe 210.

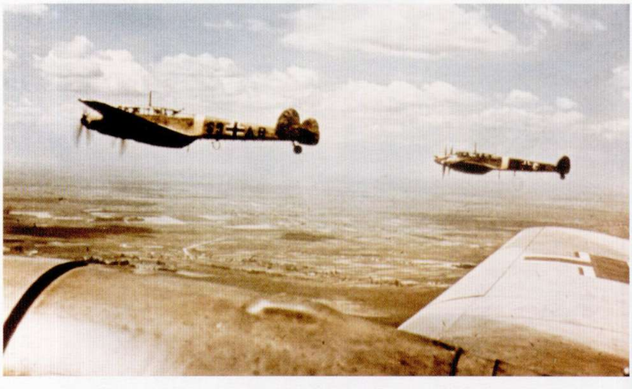
The assault on Russia was launched in the early hours of 22 June 1941. Johannes Kaufmann, a pilot with *3./SKG 210*, recalled that in the afternoon of the previous day all the flying personnel of *I./SKG 210* were assembled and addressed by the *Kommodore*, *Major* Walter Storp. A short speech followed on the forthcoming campaign, Storp conducting himself in a quiet, serious manner, showing no emotion. Operating out of Radzyn, *I./SKG 210* found itself supporting the German army's encirclement and overrunning of Russian land forces in the Bialystok-Minsk area in the early days of the campaign. The two *Gruppen* of *ZG 26* also operated in support of Army Group Centre, carrying out similar duties to *SKG 210*, although their presence in the central area of operations would be brief.

They were soon transferred north to support the German army's drive towards Leningrad. By the end of August German forces had closed to within 50 kilometres of Leningrad, but the ultimate scourge of the German military would soon come into play: the change in weather heralding the onset of winter in Russia for which neither men nor machines had been adequately prepared. By August *I.* and *II. Gruppen* of *ZG 26* were operating out of Sarudinye, both later moving to Smolensk. In both locations their roles were identical: not only attacking enemy forces, airfields, and battlefield hardware such as tanks and artillery concentrations wherever they were found, but also attacks on the communications network, particularly the rail and river network vital in bringing in supplies to the beleaguered city of Leningrad. Along with the inevitable losses came also the plaudits for *ZG 26*. On 6 August 1941 two personalities from Battle of Britain days were awarded the *Ritterkreuz*. *Hptm*. Herbert Kaminski, *Gruppenkommandeur* of *I./ZG 26*, received the award, having had an eventful preceding twelve months. Shot down into the English Channel in August 1940, he and his *Bordfunker* spent a considerable amount of time in their dinghy before being rescued. Then, during the Balkans campaign, he was shot down again and spent 11 days in captivity before being released by a German army unit. Undeterred, he was back on flying duties immediately. His *Luftwaffe* career took him to a staff posting for a time, before leading *II./ZG 76* in missions against American bombers over the Reich in late 1943 to August 1944. He survived the war.

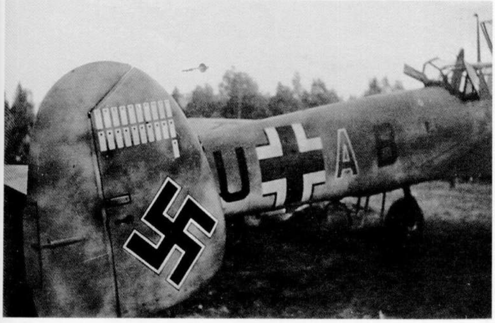
Hptm. Theo Rossiwall of *5./ZG 26* was also a recipient of the *Ritterkreuz* on the same day as Kaminski. Taking over *5. Staffel* on 19 May 1940 following the shooting down of *Staffelkapitän Hptm*. Eberhard von Treutschler d'Elsa on the previous day, Rossiwall led the *Staffel* throughout the rest of the Western campaign, the Battle of Britain, the Balkans campaign, and into the Russian conflict. When the *Staffel* was incorporated into the night fighting arm, he later became *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./NJG 4*. He later took up post as *Kommandeur* of the training unit *I./ZG 101*, and when *ZG 76* was re-constituted in August 1943 he was posted in as *Geschwaderkommodore*. Ultimately he reached war's-end in a staff post and returned to his home city of Vienna, where he died in 1979.

While on the Leningrad front, *Oblt*. Werner Thierfelder was also awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 10 October 1941. Thierfelder, another veteran of the Western campaign and Battle of Britain, took part in the Balkans campaign and the initial thrust against Russia. Moving to *ZG 2* in 1942, he later led *Erprobungskommando Me 262*, and in June 1944 was *Gruppenkommandeur* of *III./ZG 26*. He was killed in July 1944, the exact circumstances of his flying accident never fully explained.

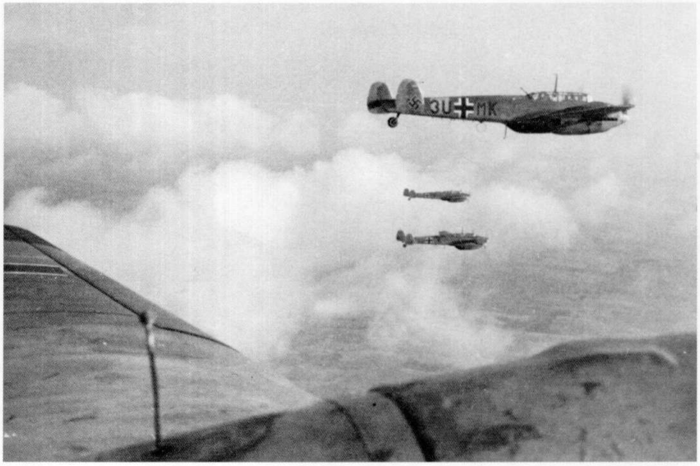
Through the winter of 1941/42 the two *Gruppen* of *ZG 26* were rotated between the Russian Front and Germany, and it was during one such stint on the Russian Front on 27 January 1942 that *I./ZG 26* lost its *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm*. Wilhelm Spies, shot down on a low-level attack south-west of Suchinitschi in *Bf 110 C-4*, 3U+FH. Spies had



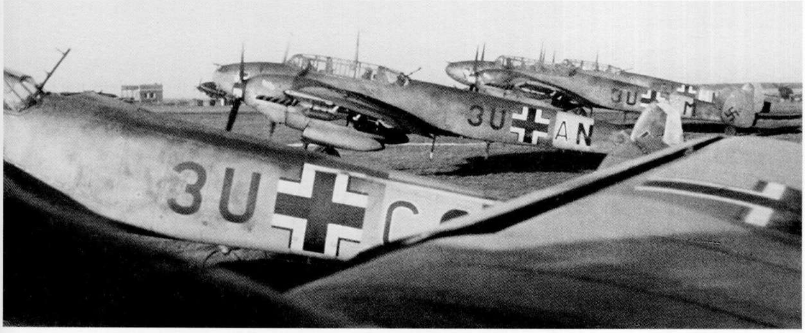
BELOW: In-flight view of S9+AB and S9+CB of the Gruppenstab of I./SKG 210. Note that both aircraft have the yellow theatre band. S9+AB has the revised tail wheel with the small scissors link.



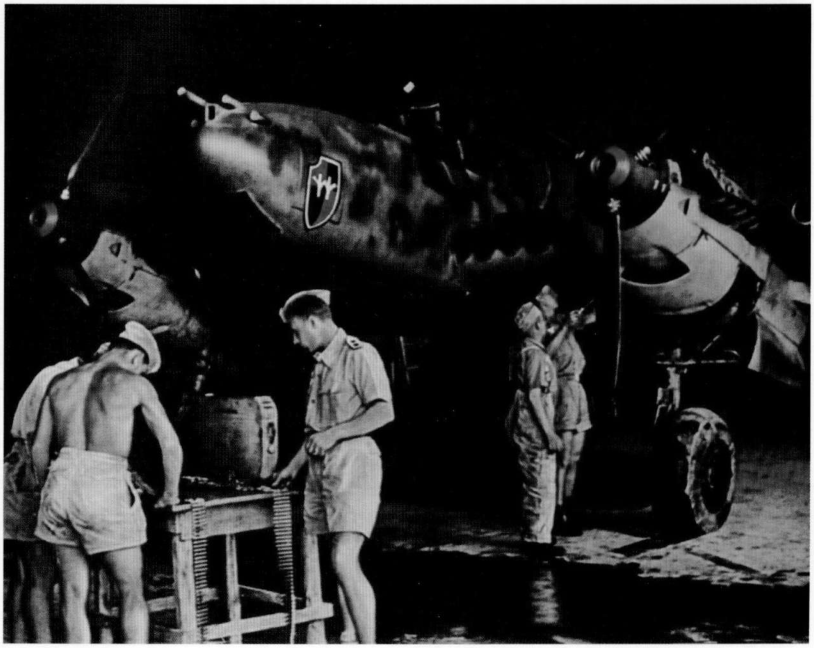
ABOVE: 3U+AB, the machine of Hptm. Wilhelm Spies, Gruppenkommaneur of I./ZG 26, with twenty one victory bars on the fin. The letter 'A' is in the Gruppenstab colour of green, outlined in white. Note the protective cover over the Bordfunker's machine gun. Spies was killed in action on 27 January 1942 on the Russian front during a low-level attack south-west of Suchinitschi.



ABOVE: 2./ZG 26 on the Russian Front. 3U+MK carries its unit code on a broad yellow theatre band, and the starboard engine cowling appears to be completely painted in yellow. The individual aircraft letter 'M' is black with a small white outline. The rudders appear to be in a lighter overall camouflage colour than the fins.



ABOVE: Bf 110s of II./ZG 26, with 3U+CC of the Gruppenstab nearest the camera. 3U+AN of 5. Staffel carries the Geschwader emblem on the nose and the II. Gruppe clog emblem on the engine cowling. The 4. Staffel machine behind it also carries the same emblems. 3U+AN has light coloured rudders, possibly yellow, perhaps an identifying feature of the Staffelkapitän's aircraft. Note the strong contrast of the camouflage colours on the wing of the Bf 110 from which the photograph was taken.



RIGHT: This colour view of a ZG 26 Bf 110 E shows an intense mottle on the fuselage sides. The Geschwader emblem, the stylised initials of Horst Wessel, after whom the Geschwader's honour title was named, on a shield quartered in red and black, can be seen. Red spinner tips and yellow lower engine cowlings are also in evidence. It is likely that the upper engine cowlings were also in yellow.

RIGHT: Herbert Schob of 2./ZG 26 belly-landed this Bf 110 E following a mission on the Russian Front.

LEFT: Belly-landed Bf 110 E of ZG 26 on the Russian front. Note the variation in the style of the shield compared to that on the colour photograph shown earlier. The position of the rear fuselage indicates that it has been badly broken on impact.

BELOW: Hptm. Wilhelm Spies, Gruppenkommandeur of I./ZG 26, killed in action on 27 January 1942. Spies was awarded the Oakleaves to the Knights Cross, and promoted to Major, posthumously.

been awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 14 June 1941, and would be posthumously promoted to *Major*, and awarded the Oakleaves to his *Ritterkreuz* on 5 April 1942. Another loss to be suffered was Knights cross holder *Lt.* Eduard Meyer, killed in a mid-air collision in *Bf 110 E-2*, 3U+PL, on 31 March 1942 near Welish.

Shortly afterwards, both *Gruppen* returned to Germany where the *Gruppen* were disbanded and their personnel transferred to the *I.* and *II. Gruppen* of *NJG* 4.

SKG 210, like all other *Luftwaffe* units on the Russian Front, led a nomadic life, never remaining in one location for any great length of time, particularly at the outset of the campaign. So it was, for example, that *II. Gruppe*, from its starting point of Rogozniczka in Poland on 22 June, occupied airfields at Bojari, Orscha, Schatalowka, and Maletino before the end of July. Things slowed as the year progressed, and later bases were Prichon, Seschtschinskaja, Orel and Bryansk up to the year's end. Likewise *I./SKG 210* who, after the opening days of the campaign, moved on to Minsk, Orscha, Schatalowka, Witebsk, Seschtschinskaja, Nowgorod and Konotop. A mission from this initial period of the invasion of Russia is described by Johannes Kaufmann of *3./SKG 210*. "On the following day I flew my first mission of the day in the afternoon. We took off at 15:45 hours in formation and flew on a low-level mission following up reconnaissance reports as previous, but we were suddenly attacked by Russian fighters and no longer had the opportunity to carry out our attack in the accepted manner.

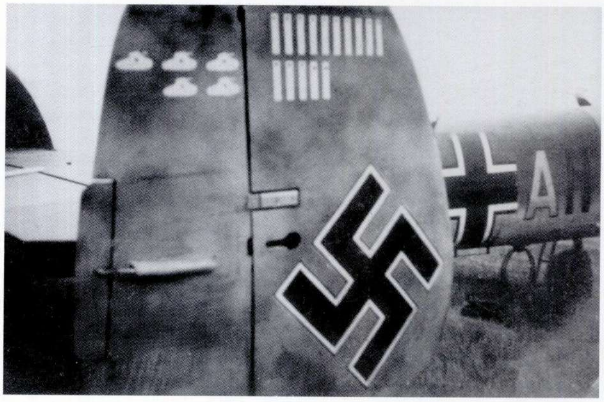
"We acquitted ourselves well against the enemy, although we were taken completely by surprise and were attacked by a whole squadron. I received several hits and had once more to head for home with a dead engine. I succeeded in hitting a Russian fighter at close quarters, but could not see what happened next, as he broke away and I had to hastily shut down my overheating engine and set course for home. This time I did not return alone. My comrades took me in their midst and gave me protection. With this mission our time in Minsk was at an end. The front was moving swiftly and had reached the Dnjepr, which was too great a distance from Minsk. Therefore, after only five days in Minsk we moved to Orscha on 12 July 1941."

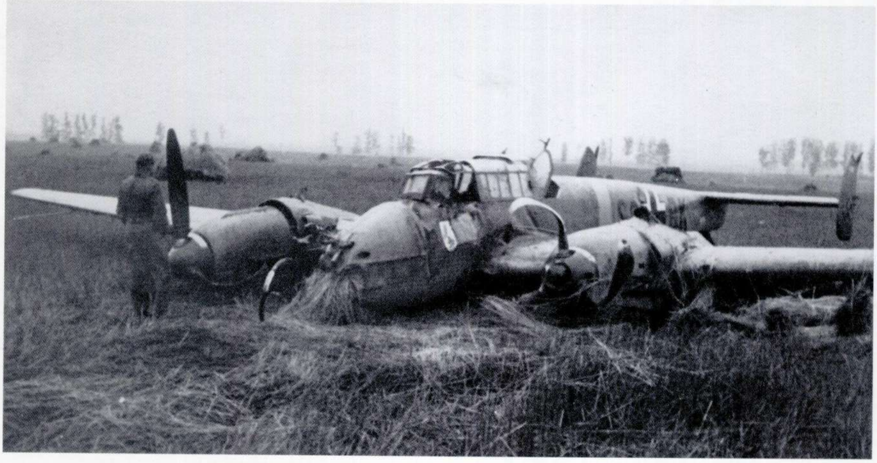
In *I. Gruppe*, *Oblt.* Wolfgang Schenck was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 14 August 1941. He had already run up a considerable number of missions in the Polish campaign, Western campaign, Battle of Britain, and now on the Russian Front, the last two campaigns flying the *Bf 110* as a fighter-bomber. *II./SKG 210*'s operations in the early months of the Russian campaign were recognised by the award of the *Ritterkreuz* to *Oblt.* Günther Tonne and *Ofw.* Johannes Lutter. Tonne at this time led *6. Staffel*, and would later become *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 1* when *Hptm.* Rolf Kaldrack was killed in action in February 1942. He was later posted to *SKG 10* as *Geschwaderkommodore*, flying fighter-bomber missions with that unit, and it was on such a mission on 15 July 1943 that he was killed when his aircraft crashed on take-off due to engine problems. He was awarded the Oak Leaves to his *Ritterkreuz* posthumously. Lutter received his *Ritterkreuz* after completing 150 missions, and his *Luftwaffe* career saw him fly with *10./SKG 10* and later be appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *8./SG 4*. He survived the war, finishing with the rank of *Hauptmann* and with 400 missions to his credit.

Success on land and in the air did come at a cost, however. As early as 29 June *2./SKG 210* lost its *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Friedrich Amende, in *Bf 110 E-2*, S9+MK, when he failed to return from an armed reconnaissance mission. In July, *Oblt.* Kurt Jacobs of the *Geschwaderstab* was killed when his *Bf 110 E-2*, S9+BA, received a direct hit from flak. On 14 August the successor to Amende as *Staffelkapitän* of *2./SKG 210*, *Oblt.* Fritz Andres, was killed in action, again falling victim to a direct hit from flak in *Bf 110 E-2*, S9+AK. On the same day, 5. *Staffel* lost its *Staffelkapitän* when *Oblt* Günther Schmidt did not return from a mission in S9+BN, another E-2 variant.

Worse was to follow on 13 September, when *Bf 110 E-2*, S9+AB, of the *Gruppenkommandeur* of *I. Gruppe*, *Hptm.* Karl-Heinz Stricker, suffered hits in both engines and crashed north of Akkulitschi. Stricker was killed and his *Bordfunker* *Ofw.* Karl Reiche died of his wounds 10 days later.

BELOW: Bf 110 E, S9+AH, of Oblt. Wolfgang Schenck, Staffelkapitän of 1./SKG 210, seen at Seschtschinskaja in September 1941. The yellow Russian theatre band can just be seen ahead of the letter 'H' of the fuselage code. The individual aircraft letter 'A' is white with a thin black outline. The fuselage cross is a reversion to the earliest style used. The rudder shows the destruction of five Russian tanks, and the fin shows a total of 15 victory bars.





RIGHT: S9+BK, W.Nr. 4108, a Bf 110 E-1 of 2./SKG 210, whose pilot carried out a successful belly-landing near Seschtschinskaja after receiving combat damage. The unit emblem can be seen on the forward fuselage, and the yellow Russian front theatre band is in the wing root position. Note that the Bordfunker's central rear canopy is not fitted on this machine.

WOLFGANG SCHENCK

Wolfgang Schenck, or ‘Bombo’ Schenck as he came to be known in Luftwaffe circles, was born on 7 February 1913 in Windhoek, German South West Africa. His father, Johannes, had moved there in 1901 and taken up farming. His mother died in 1921, and in 1923, 10 year-old Wolfgang and his sister moved back to Germany to live with family in Berlin. In his teenage years he lived in Krefeld and Köln. In 1934 he returned to South West Africa and spent time working on a coffee plantation. However, as he already held the ‘C’ flying certificate for gliding, and ‘A’ certificate for powered flight, he decided to return to Germany to take up a flying career. He entered military service in December 1936 as an officer-cadet, and was posted to *II./JG 132 ‘Richthofen’* in Jüterbog in 1938. Through re-designations, this unit was eventually to *become I. Gruppe, Zerstörergeschwader 1 (I./ZG 1)*, and it was with *1. Staffel* of *ZG 1* that Wolfgang Schenck started his war service, taking part in the Polish campaign in September 1939 and the Norwegian campaign in the spring of 1940. It was not until the Western campaign that he scored his first aerial success, on 11 May 1940. However on 16 May, in combat with nine Hurricanes, he was seriously wounded, but managed to return to base. Several months in hospital followed, and when he was fully recovered, he determined that he was going to rejoin his old *Staffel*. On his own initiative he established that *1./ZG 1* was now *1. Staffel, Erprobungsgruppe 210* (*Erpr. Gr. 210*). Accordingly, he travelled to France on 4 September and was in the crew room at Denain when *Erpr. Gr. 210* returned from a mission over England. Meeting a disgruntled *Oberleutnant* Martin Lutz (the second *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm*. Hans von Boltenstern, had been lost over the Channel on the mission) he asked if Lutz could arrange for him to join *1./Erpr. Gr. 210*. Lutz told him to leave it to him as he would make the necessary arrangements. Wolfgang Schenck’s involvement with the unit was instant. With the loss of von Boltenstern, Martin Lutz became acting-*Gruppenkommandeur*, *Oblt*. Werner Weymann, the acting-Adjutant moved to *1. Staffel* to become acting-*Staffelkapitän* to fill the gap left by Lutz, and Wolfgang Schenck took up the post of *Adjutant* from 5 September.

From then on, matters moved at a fast pace. On 27 September Martin Lutz was lost in action, (his aircraft was found to have the mysterious ‘*Seilbomben*’ control box fitted when it was examined by RAF Intelligence Officers). One of the duties of the *Adjutant* was to oversee the equipment on the aircraft of the unit. *Seilbomben* was a device whereby a reinforced steel wire trailed from a set of pulleys under the fuselage of a Bf 110, with a small weight on the end of it. In the event of the invasion of England taking place, *1. Staffel* would fly slow, low-level, missions trailing the ‘wire rope bombs’ over power cables in the invasion area. When the invasion was cancelled, Schenck had the all the control boxes removed from the *1. Staffel’s* aircraft, or so he thought. At one unit reunion he recounted the details of the *Seilbomben* device, but was dismayed when told of the fact that Martin Lutz’s aircraft still had the control box in it when it came down in England. “I failed in my duty with that falling into British hands” he said. What Schenck did not know was that Lutz’s normal aircraft had been damaged some days before he was shot down over England, so Lutz simply took a *1. Staffel* Bf 110 for his own use. Schenck had the control boxes taken out of all the *1. Staffel* aircraft, but had not checked the *Gruppenstab* Bf 110s of the unit, where the rogue *1. Staffel* Bf 110 with the *Seilbomben* control box still in place was on charge. Schenck remembered the words of Lutz before his last flight. Shaking Schenck’s hand, he commented, “This is my last flight here. In Denain my new ‘N’ is waiting [Bf 110 E with armour and 90 octane uprated ‘N’ engine – author’s note]. I will breathe free again after all when going into battle, but I will bite my arse should I end up on the end of a parachute this time.”

BELOW: Two views of Hptm. Wolfgang Schenck at discussions about a forthcoming mission. The Knights Cross around his neck would date the photographs as post-14 August 1941. Note the cloth SKG 210 emblem on the left breast of his jacket.

Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring visited *Erpr. Gr. 210* at Denain on 1 October 1940, and appointed Werner Weymann as acting-*Gruppenkommandeur*. Schenck was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *1. Staffel*, and at the same time promoted to *Oberleutnant*.

Weymann was shot down into the English Channel on 5 October, and with *1. Staffel* always taking the lead in the *Gruppe’s* airborne formation, Schenck had gone from ‘new recruit’ to ‘*Gruppenführer*’ (*Gruppe* leader) of *Erpr. Gr. 210* in just over four weeks! By the time the new *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Major* Karl-Heinz Lessmann from *II./ZG 2*, was posted in on 1 November, Schenck was, in effect, the leader of *Erpr. Gr. 210*. So much so, in fact, that Lessmann bowed to Schenck’s superior knowledge of the use of the Bf 110 as a fighter-bomber and flew as Number 2 to Schenck on all his missions with the unit.

Throughout the winter months Erpr. Gr. 210 was the only unit still ranged against England, and in 1941 missions were resumed against shipping and land-based targets. By the time the unit was re-designated I. *Gruppe*, *Schnellkampfgeschwader 210* (*SKG 210*) and moved east to prepare for the attack on the Russia, Schenck had flown more than 50 fighter-bomber missions against England. Schenck continued to lead *1. Staffel* once the campaign in the East opened up, and through his unstinting work with *Erpr. Gr. 210* and *SKG 210*, he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* (Knights Cross) on

14 August 1941. There followed a short spell at Rechlin at the head of the *Erprobungsstaffel Me 210*, but in January 1942 he returned to his old *Staffel*, now *1./ZG 1*. In March he was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *I. Gruppe, ZG 1*, by which time he had run up an impressive 18 aerial victories as well as claims for the destruction of enemy shipping, tanks and associated hardware in the early months of the Russian campaign.

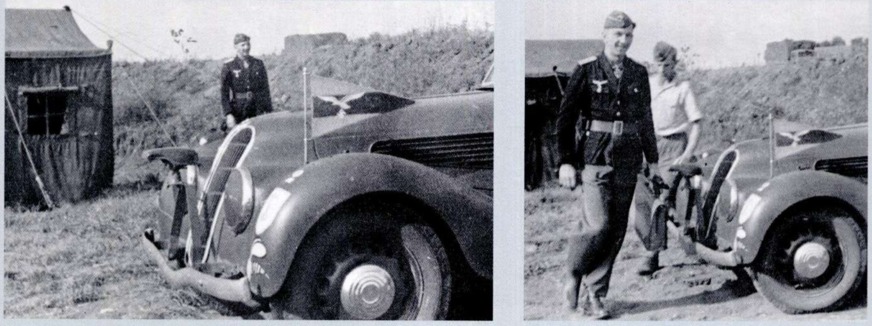
Schenck moved to a staff position in the German Air Ministry in August 1942, but by the end of January 1943 he had been appointed *Geschwaderkommodore* of *Schlachtgeschwader 2* and he transferred to the Mediterranean theatre and took up flying the Focke-Wulf Fw 190 in the fighter-bomber role. He had, in the meantime, been awarded the *Eichenlaube* (Oak leaves) to the *Ritterkreuz* on 30 October 1942 for his achievements in the fighter-bomber role. By 1943 the Allies were increasingly gaining the air superiority, and in December 1943 he was wounded in combat. Hospitalisation followed once again, and upon release he was appointed to the post of '*Inspizient der Schlachtflieger*'. In June 1944 Schenck was given responsibility for working up the Messerschmitt Me 262 as a fighter-bomber, and headed up the specialist unit for this purpose, '*Kommando Schenck*'. This led to his posting as *Geschwaderkommodore* of *Kampfgeschwader* 51 (KG 51), which unit was converting to the Me 262. His final appointment was Inspector for Jet fighters from February 1945 up to the war's end.

ABOVE: Wolfgang Schenck, facing camera, is greeted alongside a staff car.

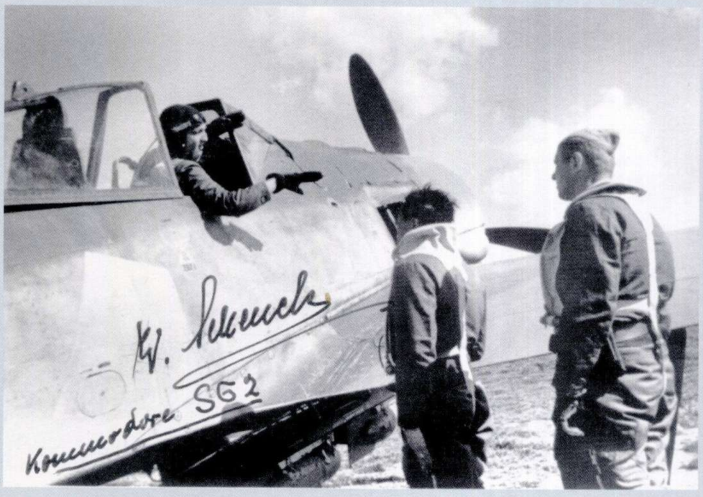
Wolfgang Schenck had undertaken over 400 combat missions, 40 of which had been in the Me 262.

Post-war, he initially returned to South Africa and took up bush flying, clocking up over 17,000 hours flying time. Ultimately, he returned to Germany and settled in Marburg. In the 1980s and 90s he was always an honoured guest at the reunions of the '*Wespengeschwader*'. He passed away some years ago in his home town, his death going almost unnoticed among the *Luftwaffe* fraternity in Germany.

Wolfgang Schenck was one of the most important figures in aviation history, given his role in the development of the fighter-bomber under operational conditions, as well as his initial pioneering work in the use of the Me 262 in the same role. Today, the jet fighter-bomber is the major strike aircraft in the inventory of every air force in the world. Schenck's place in history is assured.

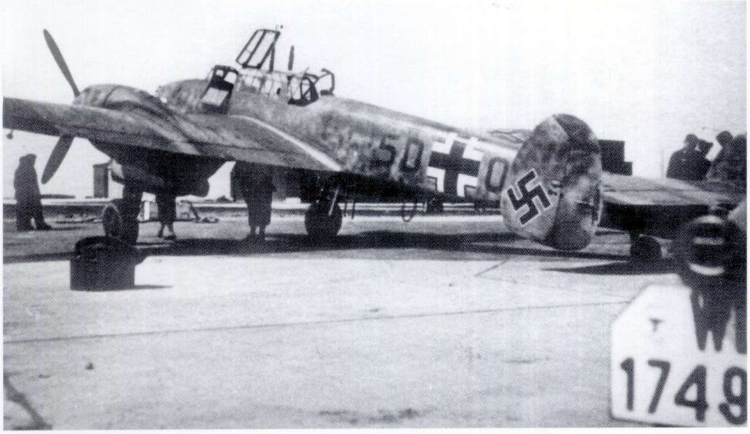


FAR LEFT AND LEFT: Two views of Wolfgang Schenck about to board a staff car. Note the emblems of SKG 210 and ZG 1 on the mudguard.



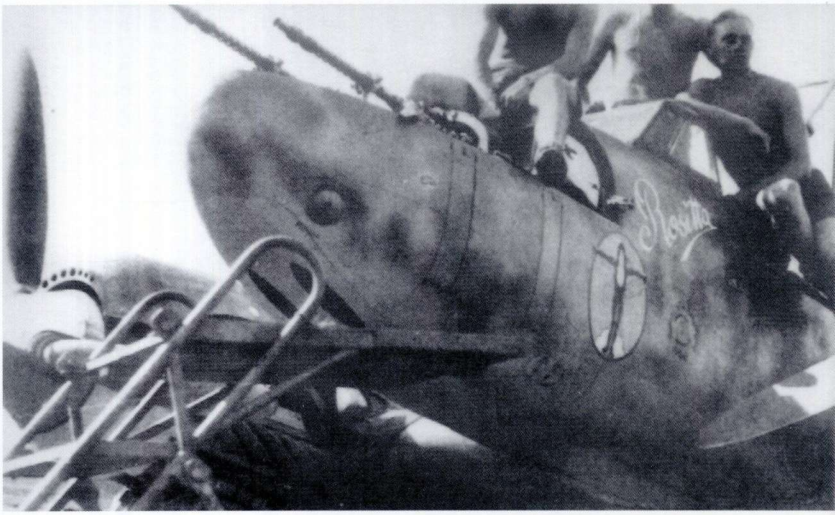
RIGHT: Wolfgang Schenck, Geschwader-kommodore of SG 2, gives instructions to two of his pilots from the cockpit of his Fw 190. The writing on the photograph is in Schenck's own hand.

FAR RIGHT: Wolfgang Schenck with his flying overalls partly on, alongside a Fw 190 of SG 2.

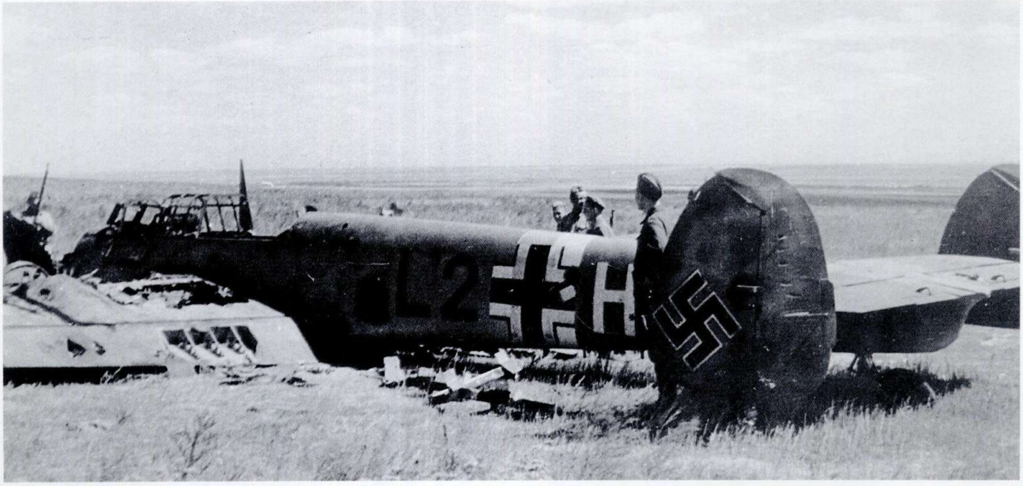


LEFT: Bf 110 E-3, 5D+OL of 3./Aufkl. Gr. 31 showing a dense mottle down the fuselage sides and on the fin and rudder.

BELOW: The nose of this Wekusta 76 Bf 110 shows the Staffel emblem and the name Rosetta above it.



BELOW: L2+HR of 7.(F)/LG 2 belly-landed on the southern Russian Front. Note that the yellow Russian Front fuselage band is positioned behind the fuselage cross, a placement not seen on the other major Bf 110 units' aircraft on this front (SKG 210, ZG 1 and ZG 26). The Staffel letter 'H' is white with no outline to it.



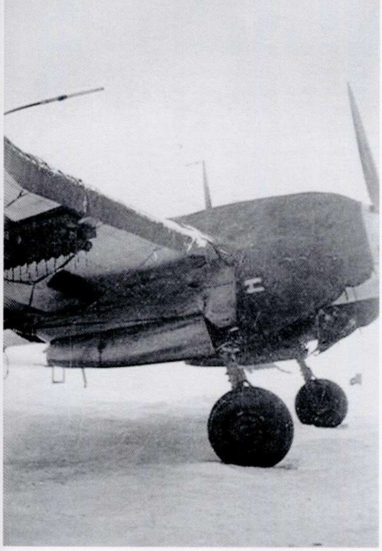
ABOVE: This reconnaissance Bf 110 of Aufkl. Gr. (F) 11 shows combat damage in the area of the Bordfunker's compartment. The crew, posing with a mechanic, appear to be unhurt.

ABOVE: 5D+OL, a reconnaissance Bf 110 E-3 of 3./Aufkl. Gr 31, forms a backdrop to aircrew activity. The yellow Russian Front theatre band can be seen on the rear fuselage. The fin is heavily mottled, in contrast to the area ahead of the unit code on the fuselage.

Hptm. Hermann Roth, who had taken over 5. *Staffel* upon the loss of Schmidt, was shot down and killed by Russian anti-aircraft fire on 6 November in S9+EN. The *Bf 110 E-2* he was flying was a 'trop' version. The tropical additions to the *Bf 110* included sand filters fitted in front of the engine air intakes, dust filters over the gun barrels, enlarged radiators, and blinds to provide protection from the sun in the cockpit. Together with the losses among the rest of the flying crews of the *Geschwader*, the unit had already paid a high price for the advances made on the ground in the early months of the campaign.

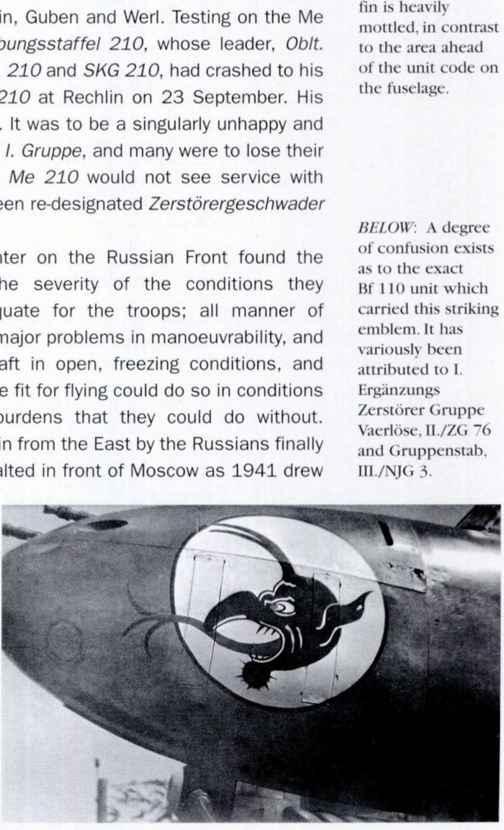
Whereas *II./SKG 210* remained on the Russian Front throughout the winter of 1941/42, *I. Gruppe* was recalled to Landsberg-Lech to begin conversion to the *Me 210*. The *Gruppe* left Russia in the first days of October, staging through Seschtschinskaja, Minsk, Deblin, Guben and Werl. Testing on the Me 210 had been conducted by *Erprobungsstaffel 210*, whose leader, *Oblt.* Heinz Forgatsch, formerly of *Erpr. Gr. 210* and *SKG 210*, had crashed to his death on a training flight in a *Me 210* at Rechlin on 23 September. His replacement was Wolfgang Schenck. It was to be a singularly unhappy and unsuccessful period for the crews of *I. Gruppe*, and many were to lose their life before it was decided that the *Me 210* would not see service with *I./SKG 210*. By then, the unit had been re-designated *Zerstörergeschwader 1*, on 4 January 1942.

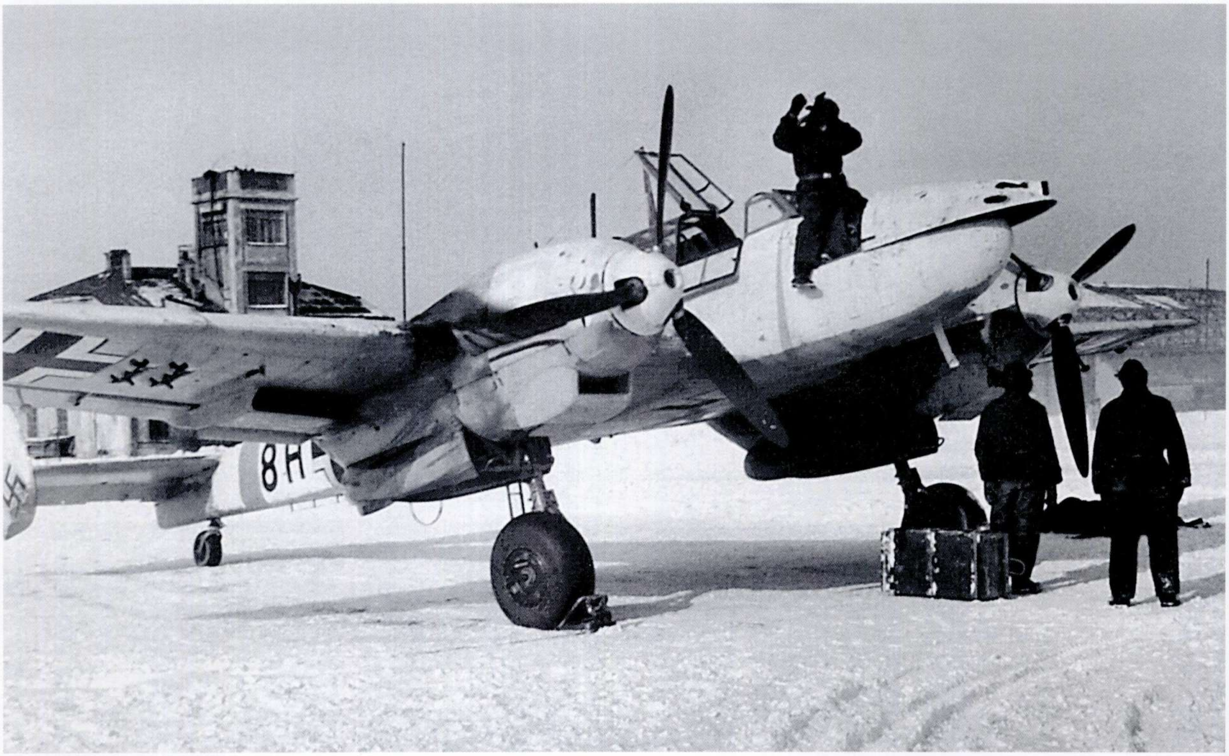
The onset of autumn and winter on the Russian Front found the German forces ill-prepared for the severity of the conditions they encountered. Clothing was inadequate for the troops; all manner of mechanised hardware experienced major problems in manoeuvrability, and for *Luftwaffe* units, servicing aircraft in open, freezing conditions, and ensuring that those aircraft that were fit for flying could do so in conditions never before encountered, were burdens that they could do without. Additionally, fresh divisions brought in from the East by the Russians finally led to the German advance being halted in front of Moscow as 1941 drew to a close. It will remain forever in the realms of speculation just what effect the few weeks the German military spent in stabilising the situation in southern Europe had on the ultimate outcome of the war against Russia. Had they been free to move against Russia four to six weeks earlier, with the result that they would have been within sight of the gates of Moscow when the weather was still eminently suitable for operations, the outcome of the war in the east could have been markedly different. 'General Winter' certainly entered the lists with telling effect on this occasion.



ABOVE: SD 2 bombs can be seen on the starboard bomb rack of this Bf 110 in the midst of a Russian winter.

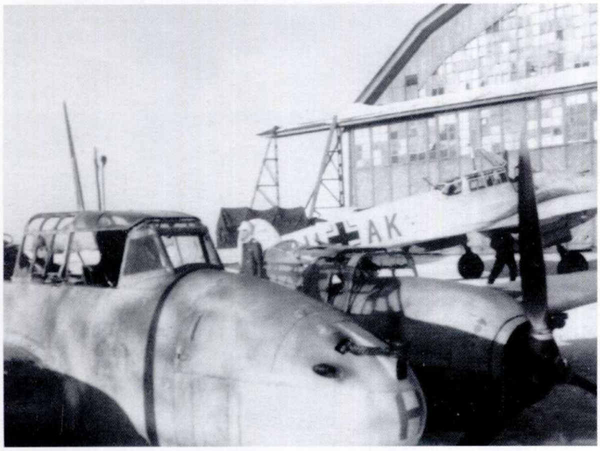
BELOW: A degree of confusion exists as to the exact Bf 110 unit which carried this striking emblem. It has variously been attributed to I. Ergänzungs Zerstörer Gruppe Vaerlöse, II./ZG 76 and Gruppenstab, III./NJG 3.



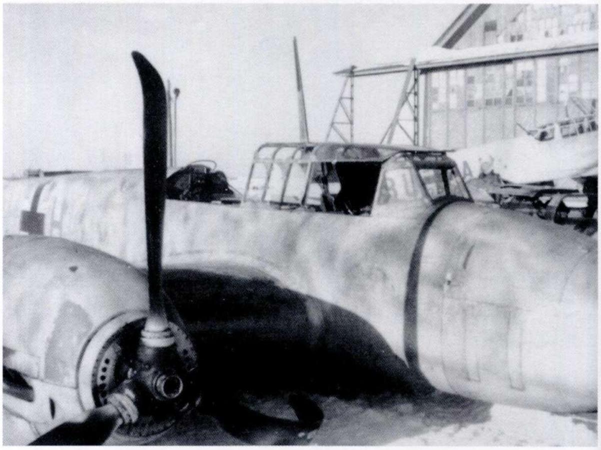


ABOVE: Bf 110 E-3 of I. Gruppe, (F)/Aufkl. Gr. 33 in the midst of the Russian winter. White winter camouflage has been applied to the aircraft, with what appears to be a fresh coat over part of the starboard engine cowlings. Although the central bomb rack is not fitted in order not to obscure the operation of the camera, bomb racks remain under the wings. The yellow Russian theatre band can be seen on the rear fuselage. An armoured windscreen is fitted, but the canopy frame has been left in its original colour, not overpainted with white.

BELOW: 3U+AK of 2./ZG 26 during the winter of 1941/42 on the Russian Front. Note that unlike the Bf 110 of (F)/Aufkl. Gr. 33 in a previous photograph, this Bf 110 has its canopy framing painted white as well as the main areas of the aircraft.



BELOW: Belly-landed Bf 110 E, 3U+HK, of 2./ZG 26, with 3U+AK in the background. Of interest is the difference in the condition of the upper surface camouflage compared with that of 3U+AK.



The Far North to the end of 1941

The *Zerstörer* presence in the far north of Europe had diminished considerably with *III./ZG 76* forming the *II. Gruppe of SKG 210. 1.(Z)/JG 77* became the sole effective *Zerstörer* fighter unit in Norway, although the *Geschwaderstab* of *ZG 76* remained in the area. The *Staffel* retained its designation until January 1942. The main duty of the *Staffel* was to provide fighter escort to the *Ju 88* bombers of *KG 30* and *Ju 87*s of *I./St.G 5*, although ground-attack duties were also undertaken. The *Staffel* transferred to Kirkenes, and on 27 June it carried out its first mission of the Russian campaign when it flew as escort to bombers for a raid on Warlamowo II airfield north of Murmansk (Warlamowo had two airfields, identified as I and II). Combat was joined with Russian I-15s and I-153s without any loss to the Staffel, but on the return flight the *Bf 110*s of *Lt.* Brandis and *Ofw.* Munding collided and both had to make emergency landings without any loss of life to the crews involved. Other *Bf 110*s landed with varying degrees of damage, and two returned on one engine. It was a rather inauspicious start for the *Staffel.*

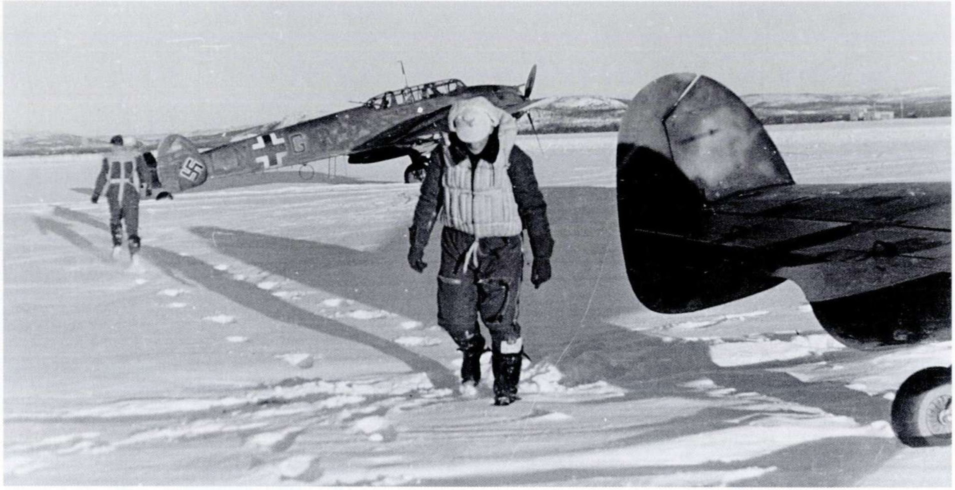
It was around the time of the start of the campaign against Russia in June 1941 that *1.(Z)/JG 77* acquired the three Dachshund pups, named 'Bamse', 'Herdla' and 'Lockheed', that inspired the *Staffel* emblem of a Russian Rata aircraft in the jaws of a Dachshund, and the unit to be named the '*Dackelstaffel*'.

Regular operations were undertaken once the Russian campaign was under way, and losses were subsequently suffered. A feature of the initial formation of the *Zerstörerstaffel* was that it was staffed by officer-pilots apart from *Ofw.* Karl Munding and *Uffz.* Rudolf Reitz. The consequence was that as losses mounted, the percentage of officers lost in action was proportionally higher than other units. The first loss of an officer during the campaign occurred on 5 July when *Bf 110 C-4*, LN+ER, W.Nr. 3235, crashed after receiving a hit from flak. The crew of *Lt.* Dietrich Weyergang, pilot, and *Uffz.* Kurt Tigger, *Bordfunker*, was killed. An indication of the sparseness of the territory over which the *Staffel* operated was shown by the fact that it was not until two weeks later that the bodies of the crew were found in the wreck of their aircraft. On 17 July another *Bf 110* was lost when *Lt* Felix Brandis ditched LN+AR, a *Bf 110 D-3* variant, in the Petsamo estuary after being hit by flak. Whereas Brandis survived the ditching, his *Bordfunker, Gefr.* Matthias Gans, went down with the aircraft. A further loss occurred on 19 July when *Lt.* Dietrich Klappenbach had to land his *Bf 110 C-4*, LN+DR, behind Russian lines. He and his *Bordfunker, Gefr.* Rudolf Methke, survived into Russian captivity.

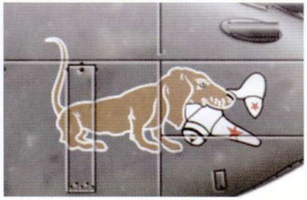
The *Geschwaderstab* of *ZG 76* suffered a heavy loss on 4 August when *Hptm.* Gerhard Schaschke was shot down and killed in action shortly after claiming his 20th victory. Worse was to follow. *1.(Z)/JG 77* had not had a Commanding Officer appointed since its inception, and when *Major* Eric Groth of the *Geschwaderstab* of *ZG 76* took off for Kirkenes on 12 August to take up the appointment, he never arrived. It was two years before Groth's *Bf 110* was found north of Bergen. Groth was one of the leading lights of *ZG 76* during the Battle of Britain, receiving the *Ritterkreuz* on 1 October 1940 after recording 13 victories. Ultimately, leadership of the Staffel was vested in *Lt.* Felix Brandis.

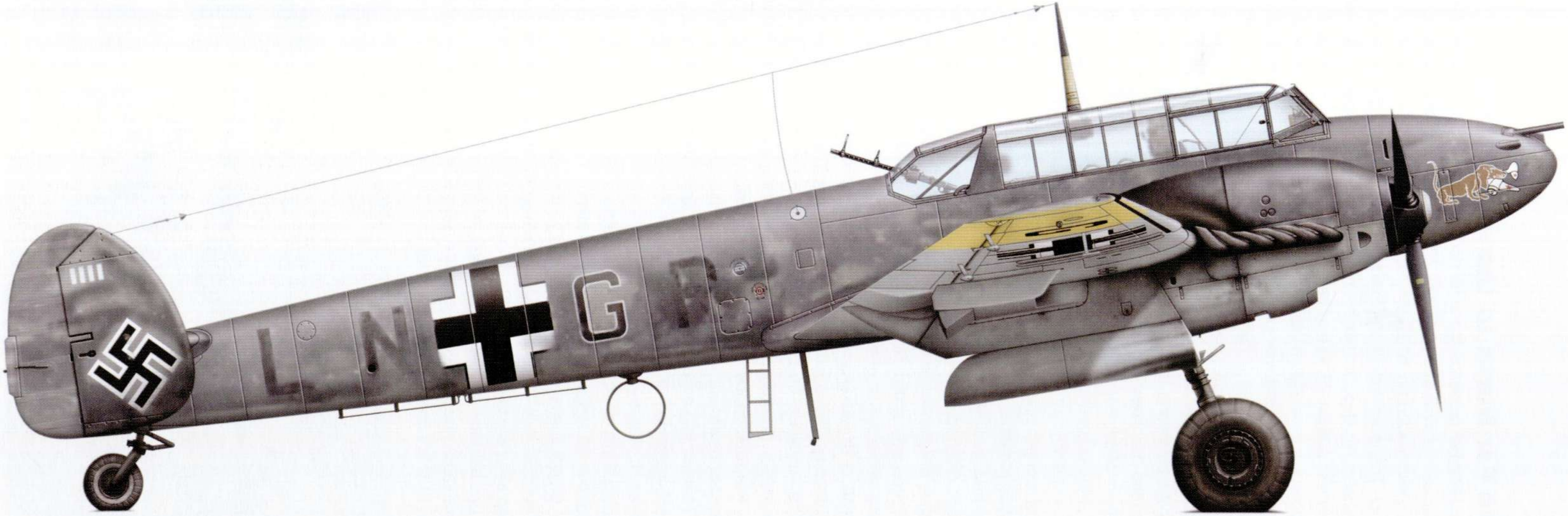
On 25 August the *Staffel* moved to Rovaniemi, in central Finland, close to the border with Sweden. An event of note occurred on 1 September while the *Staffel* was still based at Rovaniemi, when *Bf 110*s flown by *Lt* Brandis and *Uffz.* Reitz lost their bearings and landed in Sweden. The crews were interned for a time, but later returned to their unit. Both were flying recently delivered *Bf 110 'E-1'* variants, which had bomb racks fitted under the central fuselage and under the wings as standard. The stay in Rovaniemi was only of short duration, and the *Staffel* returned to Kirkenes at the end of the first week in September.

BELOW LEFT AND BELOW: 12 August 1941. Two views of Bf 110 E, M8+KC, of the Gruppenstab of II./ZG 76. The German officer in the centre of the photograph (below) is Major Erich Groth, Gruppenkommandeur of II./ZG 76. Later in the day, he was lost on a non-combat flight in Bf 110 E-1, M8+TC, W.Nr. 3863.



Hptm. Schmidt and Uffz. Friedrich of 1.(Z)/JG 77 are seen on a snow-covered Petsamo airfield on 11 September 1941. LN+GR, a Bf 110 E-2, has dense mottling down the fuselage sides.





Messerschmitt Bf 110 E-2, LN+GR, of 1.(Z)/JG 77

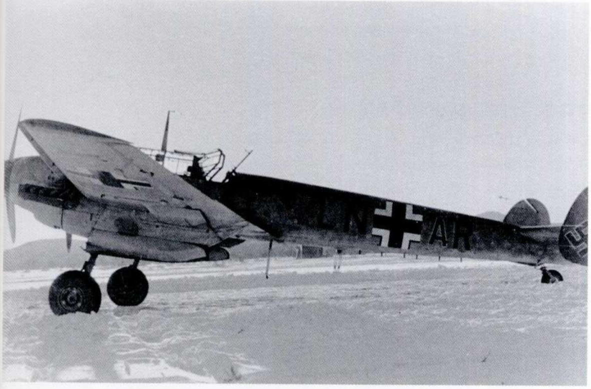
LN+GR, a Bf 110 E-2, of 1.(Z)/JG 77 is seen in September 1941. The fuselage code has suffered slightly from a re-spray on the fuselage sides. The undersides of the wingtips are painted yellow, and an armoured windscreen is fitted. Note the scissors link on the tailwheel, a feature which increasingly appeared on Bf 110s from 1941 onwards, both factory-fitted and as an update fitted in the field.

Later in the month, on 15 September, another *Bf 110* was lost, but what was unusual this time was the fact that it carried a crew of three. *Lt.* Heinz-Horst Hoffmann, *Gefr.* Rudolf Böhm and *Lt.* Heinz Wenk were killed when their *Bf 110 C-4* was shot down in combat. Wenk was a war reporter, flying with them to experience a combat mission and provide a written report for his *Propaganda Kompanie* superiors. On the following day *Lt.* Felix Brandis featured again, making a belly-landing following combat, and writing off LN+HR, a D-0, in the process.

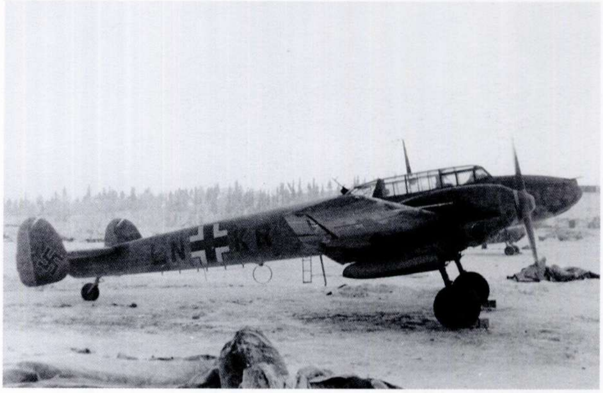
Escort missions for *Ju 87* and *Ju 88* bombers continued with regularity, and on 24 October the *Staffel* had particular success when on a '*Freie Jagd*' (literally, 'free hunt') it encountered Russian I-153s and I-16s. Claims for seven victories without loss were lodged by the pilots of the *Staffel*. On 30 October the *Staffel* moved once again to Rovaniemi. At this time of year conditions for the *Staffel* at Rovaniemi were severe: temperatures were recorded as low as minus 50! Throughout November and into December, the *Staffel*, its aircraft fitted with bombs, carried out attacks on Russian ground targets, as well as continuing to fly escort missions for standard bombers.

The final loss for the unit occurred on 15 December when *Bf 110 E-2*, LN+KR, crewed by *Lt.* Eberhard Reichel, pilot, and *Bordfunker Gefr.* Günther Böhmer, crashed while flying escort to two *Ju52/3ms*. Both crewmen were killed. The *Staffel* flew its last mission of the year on 27 December.

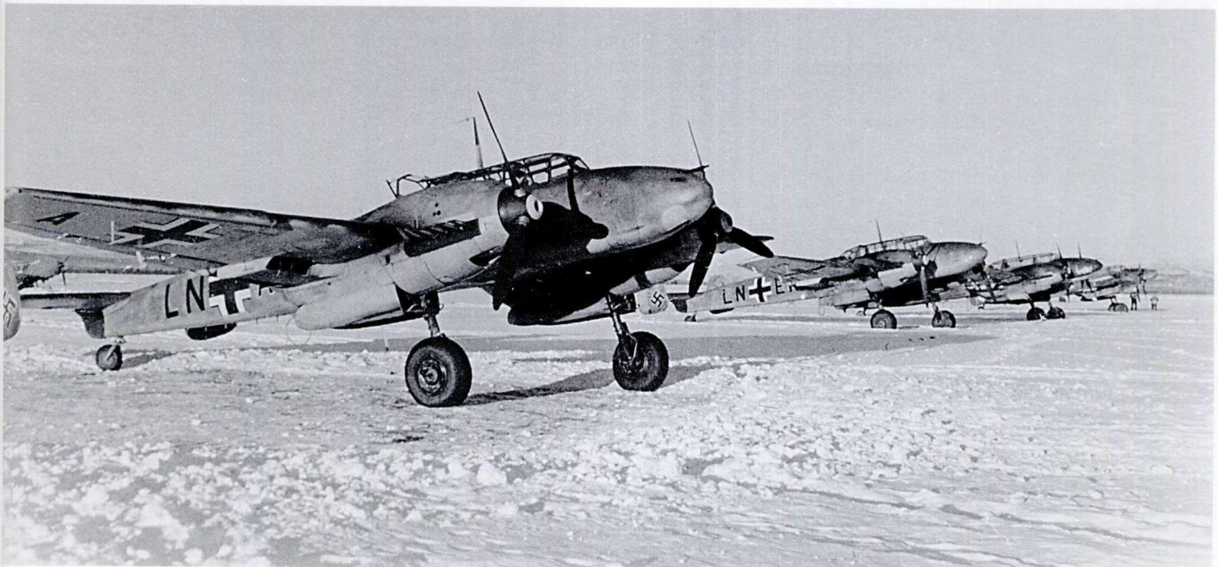
BELOW: October 1941 at Petsamo. Bf 110 E-2, LN+AR, W.Nr. 2546 of Lt. Felix Brandis of 1.(Z)/JG 77. Note that this 'E' has had the under wing bomb racks removed.



BELOW: LN+KR, the Bf 110 E-2 of Lt. Reichel and Gefr. Böhmer. Reichel and Böhmer crashed to their deaths in this machine on 15 December 1941.



BELOW: A line-up of Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77 at Petsamo in October 1941. Oblt. Felix Brandis was killed in LN+AR on 2 February 1942. LN+ER was the normal mount of Lt. Schlossstein.



1942

January 1942 proved to be a difficult month for *I./ZG 1* in its training on the *Me 210 A-1*. One crew crashed to their deaths on 15 January, several crash-landings and belly-landings took place, and on 31 January the unit suffered a double blow when two experienced pilots, *Ofw.* Otto Rückert and *Uffz.* Hans Tilheim were killed in separate crashes when the aircraft they were flying overturned on landing. The type was beset with problems: sometimes undercarriage failure, other times aborted take-offs, occasionally engine failures. February was bereft of any recorded damage or losses to aircraft or personnel, but on 3 March one crew was killed when problems with the starboard engine caused their *Me 210 A-1*, S9+IH, to crash, and three other *Me 210*s made forced-landings. More forced-landings happened in the following days, and the last recorded of these on 9 March, involving *Lt.* Gerhard Schwab and his *Bordfunker Uffz.* Karl-Fritz Schröder in S9+IL on Tours airfield, brought down the curtain on the *Gruppe*'s brief, but costly, period with the *Me 210*. The *Gruppe* would soon be re-equipped with the latest version of the *Bf 110*, the 'F-2', and return to the Russian Front.

ABOVE: Bf 110 E of an unknown unit in the middle of a Russian winter. Note the bomb rack under the fuselage and the capped spinners.

The Russian Front

On the central and southern Russian Fronts, *II./ZG 1* was the main *Zerstörer Gruppe* active at the start of 1942, although, as mentioned earlier, *I.* and *II. Gruppen* of *ZG 26* spent periods in Russia before being permanently withdrawn at the beginning of April. *II./ZG 1* passed the winter months at Bryansk, north-east of Kiev. On 24 January, a *Bf 110 E-2*, S9+TC, W. Nr. 4107, crewed by *Ofw.* Günther Schilling, pilot, and *Ofw.* Heinz Wiegand, *Bordfunker*, belly-landed behind Russian lines. The crew was seen to get away from the aircraft, but was taken prisoner by the Russians. Schilling and Wiegand were two of only a very small percentage of German prisoners of war who survived the depredations of captivity and returned to Germany in the post-war years.

Tragedy befell *II./ZG 1* on 3 February over Basary when the *Bf 110 E-2*, S9+TC, W. Nr. 4044, of *Oblt.* Wolfgang Ortmann crashed into the *Bf 110 E-1*, S9+IC, W. Nr. 4057, of *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Rolf Kaldrack. Both pilots and their *Bordfunker* were killed as a result of the collision. Rolf Kaldrack would receive the *Ritterkreuz* posthumously on 9 February. A further loss occurred on 11 February when the *Bf 110 E-2/N*, S9+HN, of the *Staffelkapitän* of *5. Staffel*, *Oblt.* Helmut Lölhöffel von Lowensprung did not return from a combat mission. Missions continued throughout February with singular losses on the 27 and 28 of the month. The *Bf 110* lost on 27 February south of Mosalsk was the rare 'C-6' variant, of which only 12 were ever built.

Soldiering on into March, *4./ZG 1* lost its *Staffelkapitän* (and the acting-*Gruppenkommandeur* since the death of Rolf Kaldrack) when *Hptm.* Walter Poka von Pokafalva was shot down and killed north-east of Staritza in *Bf 110 E-2*, S9+CM, on 7 March. By 9 March the *Gruppe* was withdrawn from the Russian Front, resulting in no *Zerstörer* units, other than reconnaissance, being operational on that front for a time.

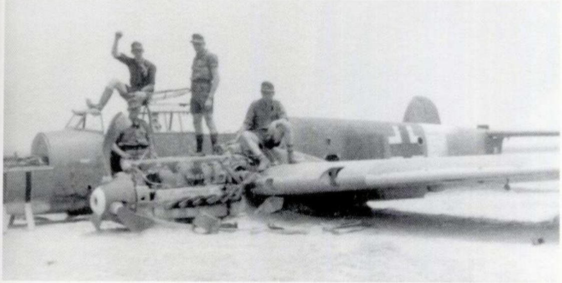
BELOW: Bf 110, 5M+R, of the little known Wekusta 26. The aircraft of this Staffel did not carry any fourth character, the Staffel identifier, in its fuselage code.

African Stalemate

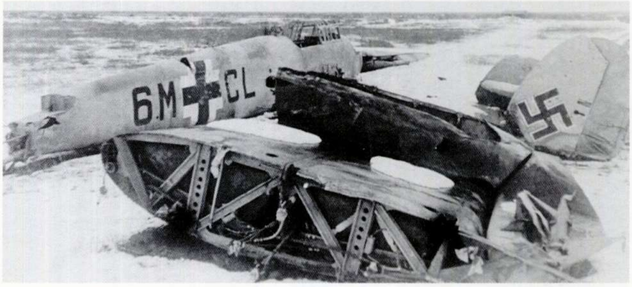
1942 opened with Malta still being the thorn in the side of the Axis forces, it being a natural obstacle to the shipment by air or by sea of supplies to the African theatre. *III./ZG 26*, still based in the area, was best suited to long-range escort duties for *Ju 52/3m* transport aircraft, and escort for shipping taking supplies to Rommel's troops. There was a singular lack of activity on the ground in the early months of 1942, with both sides attempting to build up supplies to sufficient strength for further attacks. In this respect, the pattern of 'advance, then retreat' would continue in 1942. The *Zerstörer* of *III./ZG 26* therefore found themselves on escort missions, and the occasional interception of Allied aircraft in the first months of the year. On one such mission on 12 February, *Lt.* Wehmeyer, one of the more successful pilots of *III./ZG 26*, claimed a Beaufighter to take his victory score into double figures.

Although Malta continued to suffer almost constant air attacks from the Luftwaffe in the early part of 1942, *III./ZG 26* rarely provided escort. It did, however, raid Malta on 21 March in the role of fighter-bombers, attacking Ta Kali airfield. Intercepted by Hurricanes before they could complete their attack, the *Bf 110*s did little damage to the airfield, and suffered the loss of one of their machines.

March heralded the award of more honours to *Zerstörer* pilots, all from *ZG 26*. The *Staffelkapitän* of *8. Staffel*, *Oblt.* Fritz Schulze-Dickow, received the *Ritterkreuz* on 7 March. He would later become *Gruppenkommandeur* of *III./ZG 26*, and in August 1944 take up the post of *Geschwaderkommodore* of *ZG 101*. He survived the war, attaining the rank of *Major*. Eleven days later, Schulze-Dickow's *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Georg Christl, also received the *Ritterkreuz*. Christl would later move to a post with the Staff of the General of Fighters, and in June 1944 he took up post as Commanding Officer of *JGr 10*, which position he retained until the end of the war. On the same day, *Oblt.* Johannes Kiel, *Staffelkapitän* of *3./ZG 26*, was honoured with the same award. Kiel would go on to lead *III./ZG 76* in Reich defence duties, and was killed in action on 29 January 1944 while intercepting an American raid.



ABOVE: Derelict 3U+ER of 7./ZG 26 in the desert. Note that the individual aircraft letter 'E' is black outline only on the white theatre band. The spinner tip is in the Staffel colour of white.



ABOVE: The forlorn remains of 6M+CL, a reconnaissance Bf 110 of 3./Aufkl. Gr. 11, in the desert. Note that the lighter top surface colour has been sprayed down the sides of the fuselage, and the mechanic who carried out the work carefully sprayed around the '6' in the unit code when applying the darker upper surface colour.

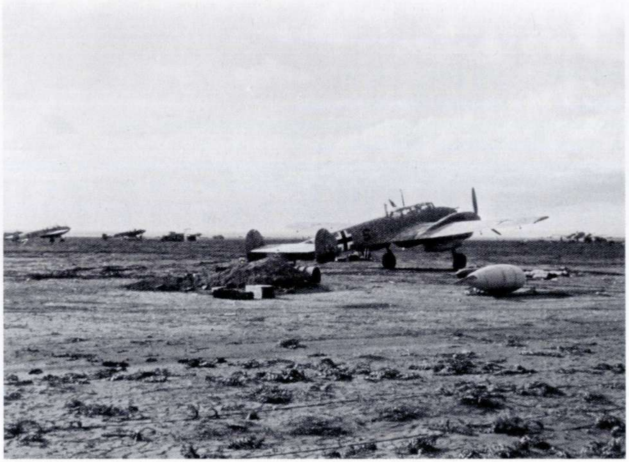
Convoy work, and occasional losses, were a feature of April, as well as occasionally intercepting bombers out seeking German convoys. The tempo increased in May as the build-up to another offensive from Rommel drew nearer. 10 May was a black day for *Ju 52/3m* transports when intercepted by Allied fighters. With only two *Bf 110*s providing escort, and only one being able to go the distance through the other having to turn back, the lumbering transports suffered heavy losses, and the lone *Bf 110* was shot down. Over the previous months the *Staffeln* of *III./ZG 26* had been located at various airfields, but in late May they were brought together at Derna. Rommel's *Afrika Korps* launched a further offensive on 26 May and *III./ZG 26* provided part of the aerial support. *Oblt.* Alfred Wehmeyer, the *Staffelkapitän* of *7./ZG 26*, continued to claim steadily, but on 1 June Wehmeyer and *Oblt.* Bittner were shot down and killed on a low level mission by anti-aircraft fire. Wehmeyer had joined *8./ZG 26* during August 1940 and began his run of victories with that *Staffel* on 18 August. He later flew with the *Gruppenstab* of *III./ZG 26*, and was posted as *Staffelkapitän* of *7. Staffel* on 11 February 1942. In the last days of his life he had undertaken night missions, claiming three Wellingtons. What was unusual was that Wehmeyer's *Bf 110*, 3U+HR, W. Nr. 2233, was a C-5 variant. The C-5 was the reconnaissance version of the 'C' Series, so it is likely that a shortage of *Bf 110*s in *III./ZG 26* resulted in *Bf 110*s being transferred from reconnaissance units to fill the gaps. Alfred Wehmeyer was posthumously awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 4 September 1942.

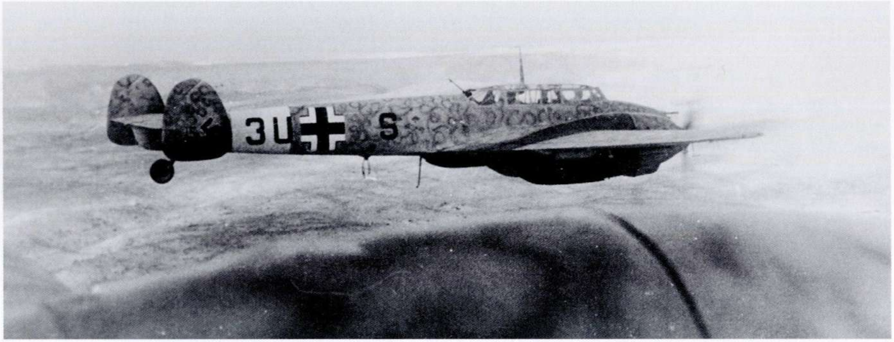
With excellent air support, Rommel's forces pressed on and captured Bir Hacheim.

By August, Allied forces had retreated to El Alamein and constructed a fresh defence line. Two of the three *Staffeln* of *III./ZG 26* returned to Crete, leaving only *8. Staffel* at Derna. The event of note to occur in August 1942 was the arrival of General Montgomery to take charge of the Allied forces in the African theatre. His appointment was to lead to the ultimate defeat of the *Afrika Korps*.

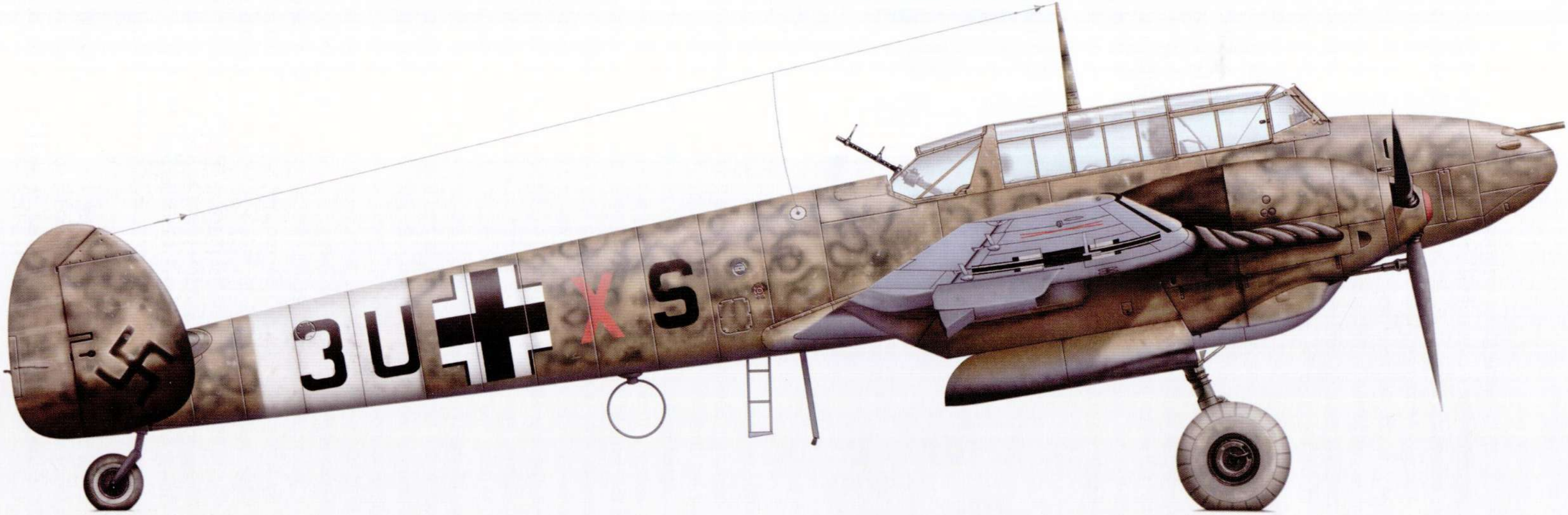
During 1942, *I./ZG 2*, taking personnel from *ZG 26*, reformed at Landsberg/Lech. It remained in existence only for a matter of months, being disbanded in August 1942 and its personnel dispersed to *NJG 4* and *III./ZG 1*.

II./ZG 2 was reformed at Landsberg/Lech and Wien-Aspern (Vienna). Like the reformed *I. Gruppe*, this *Gruppe* did not remain in existence for very long. By the end of July it had handed over its *Bf 110*s to *ZG 1* and moved to Wiener-Neustadt. In September it was re-designated *I./NJG 5*.



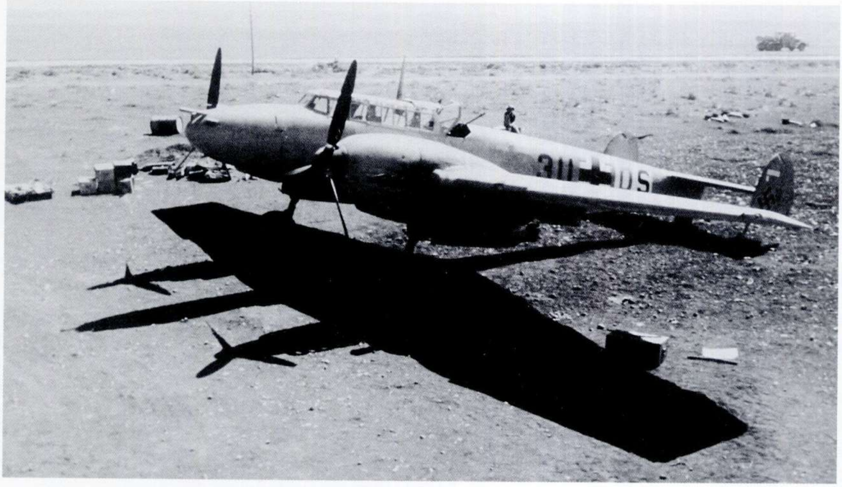


Two views of Bf 110 C-6 3U+XS of 8./ZG 26 in the desert. 3U+XS was one of three Bf 110 C-6s originally on charge with Erpr. Gr. 210 that went through repair facilities and were re-issued to ZG 26. The top surface camouflage is a single base colour with a tight 'scribble' pattern applied over it. Regarding the use of the C-6 by ZG 26 in the desert, an RAF Intelligence report stated the following: "…After a low level attack on 15.11.41 on the aerodrome at Giarabub by Me 110s, a 30 mm armour-piercing shell was found in the I.F.F. set of a Blenheim IV damaged on the ground…"



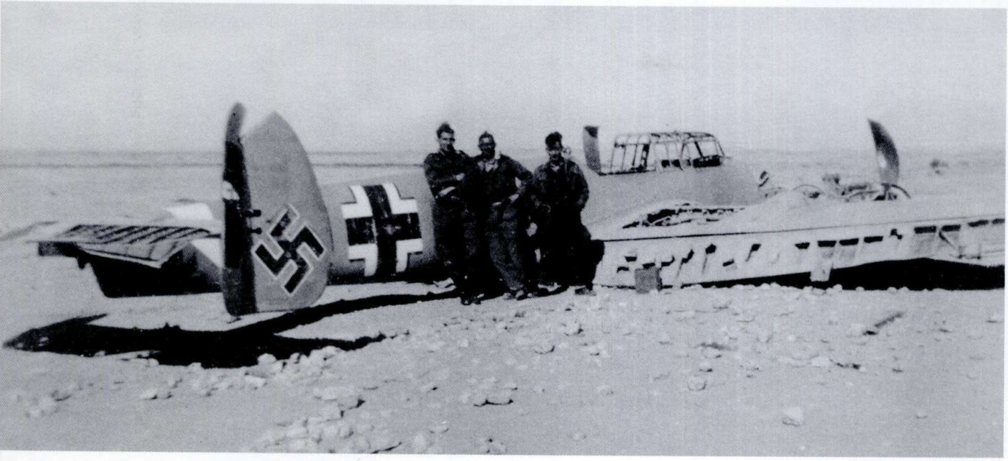
Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-6, 3U+XS, of ZG 26

3U+XS of 8./ZG 26 was one of three Bf 110 C-6s issued to ZG 26 that saw service in the African Theatre. The enlarged radiator intake indicates that the aircraft has been fitted with tropical equipment, and an armoured windscreen had been fitted. Note that the Bordfunker's central rear canopy has been removed.



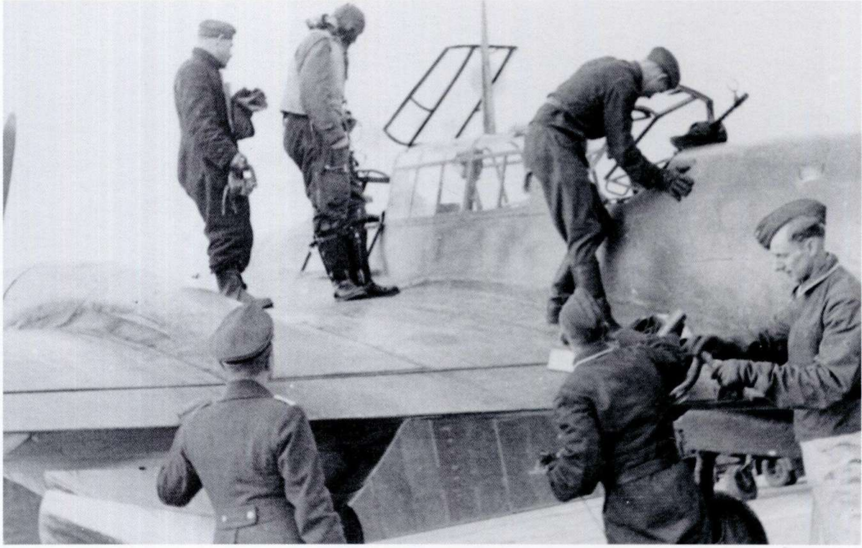
LEFT: Bf 110 E, 3U+DS, in what appears to be a single overall upper surface camouflage colour. The individual aircraft letter 'D' is in the Staffel colour of red, a reversion to the pre- and early-war colour used. It has no outline to it, having the white theatre band as a background. The spinner tip is in red also, and the port fin displays several victory bars.

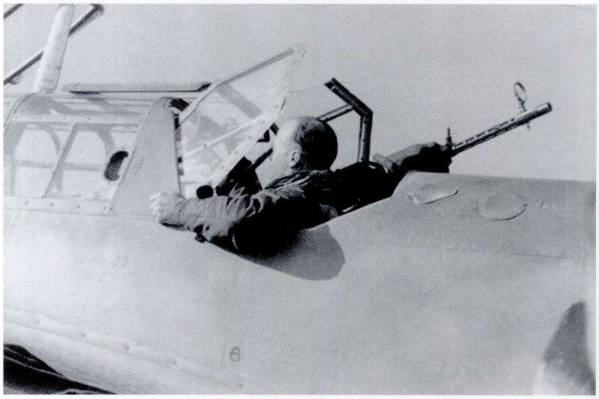
RIGHT: 3U+ZR of 7./ZG 26 carrying the same upper surface camouflage as 3U+XS. However it is not possible to determine whether this Bf 110 also carried a 30 mm cannon under the fuselage.

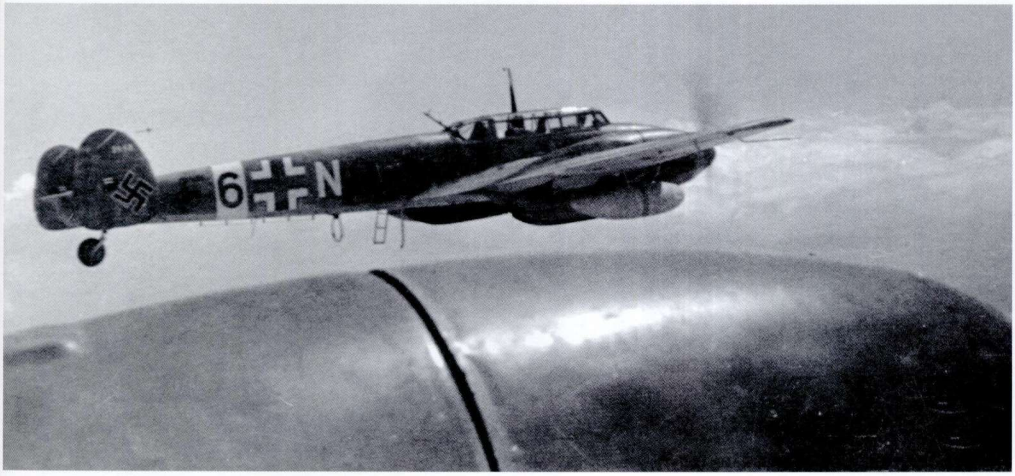


LEFT: Belly landed Bf 110 of III./ZG 26 in the desert, with a white rear fuselage band and an indistinct W. Nr. on the starboard fin.

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: These views show activity among personnel of 2./Auflk. Gr. 122. In one of the photos, note the fuel instructions for ground personnel under the Bordfunker's position: 'C2 oder C3 100', denoting the 100 octane fuel to use. In another view, the white theatre fuselage band is behind the fuselage cross, and in fact the fuselage cross is simply the black parts of the cross applied over the white band to form a complete cross.

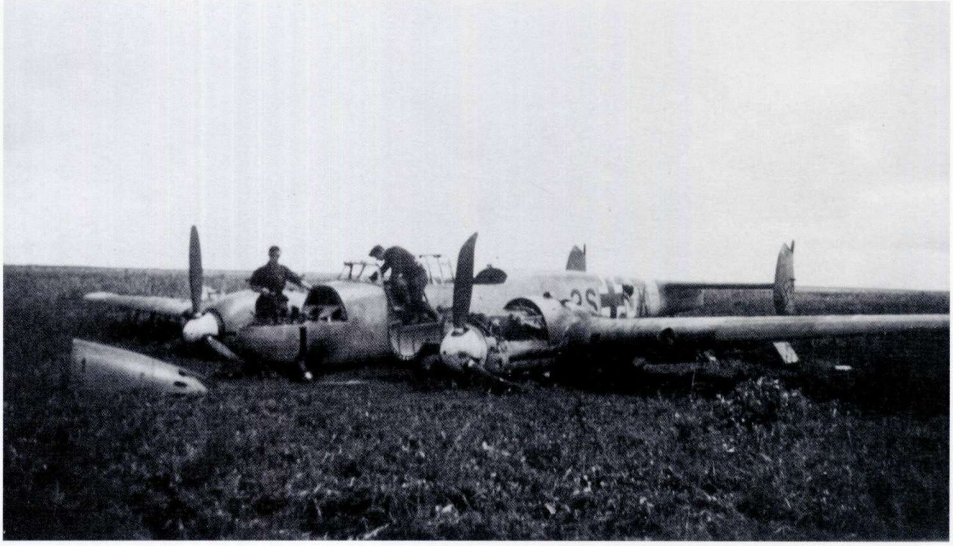




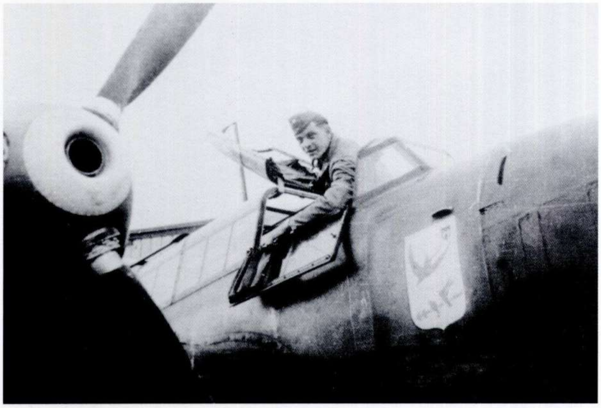


LEFT: In-flight view of an Aufkl. Gr. 122 Bf 110 E-3, with the fuselage band behind part of the fuselage code. Note the supplementary fuel tank under the wing, and the W. Nr. 2448 on the fin.

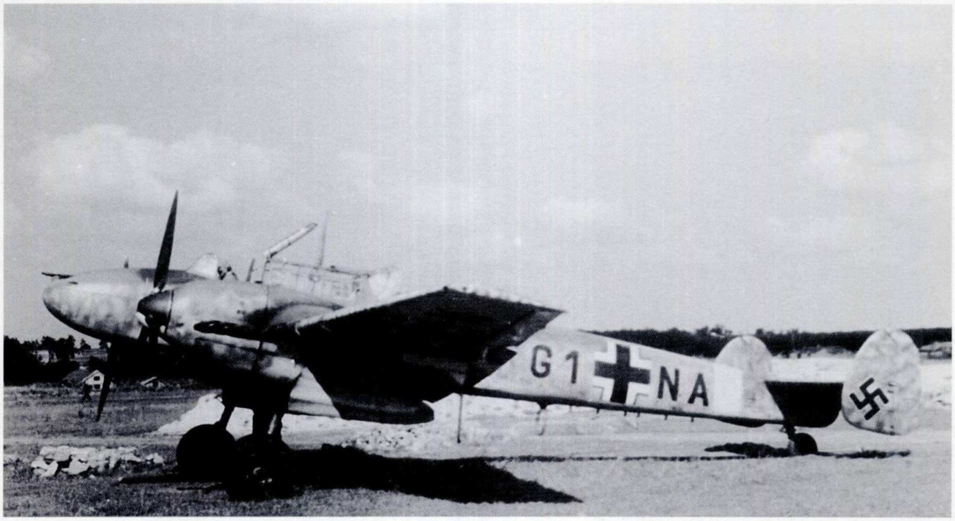
RIGHT: Bf 110 E of 2./ZG 2 belly landed on the Russian Front. ZG 2 spent only a short time on the Russian Front in mid-1942 before being disbanded and its personnel incorporated into other units. Note the rear fuselage band and the capped spinners.



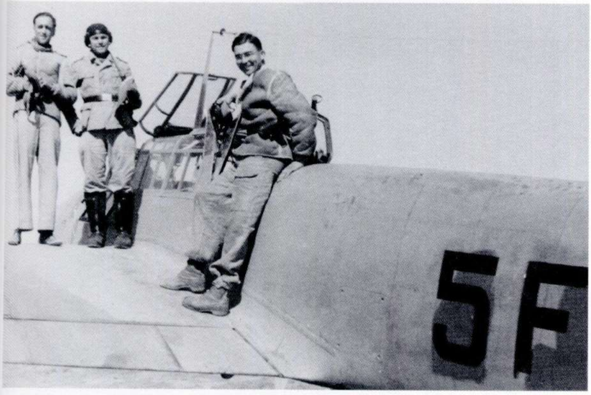
The unit emblem shown here, a flying bird, with other birds on a wire, plus the ZG 26 Geschwader emblem in the top right-hand corner, has previously been ascribed to Zerstörer Schule 2. However the connection of that training school with ZG 26 is not known. This photograph is from the private collection of a pilot who flew with III./ZG 26 in the African theatre, so the more likely explanation is that it is a III./ZG 26 emblem, that was never removed from the Bf 110s of that Gruppe when they were passed on to ZS 2.



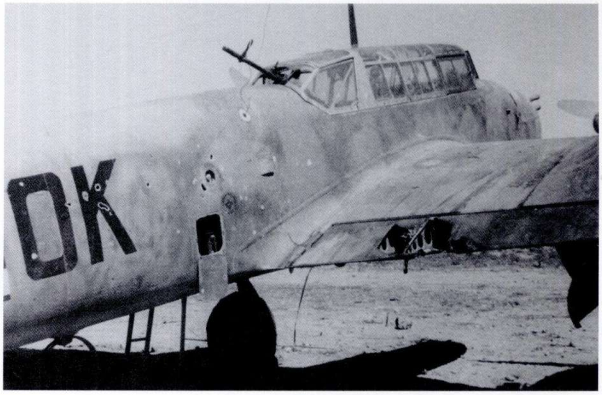
ABOVE: Personnel pose in front of a Bf 110 of Zerstörer Schule 2, showing the ZG 26/ZS 2 emblem.



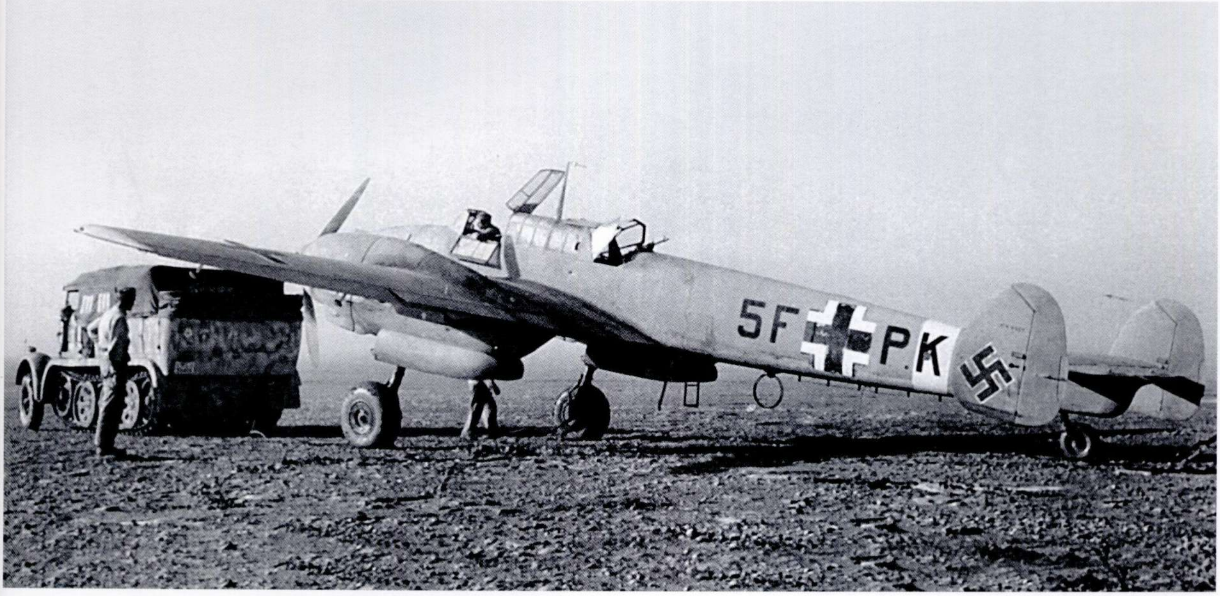
LEFT: Bf 110 E-3, G1+NA, of the Geschwaderstab of KG 55 with a white band around the rear fuselage. Note the small scissors link on the tailwheel.



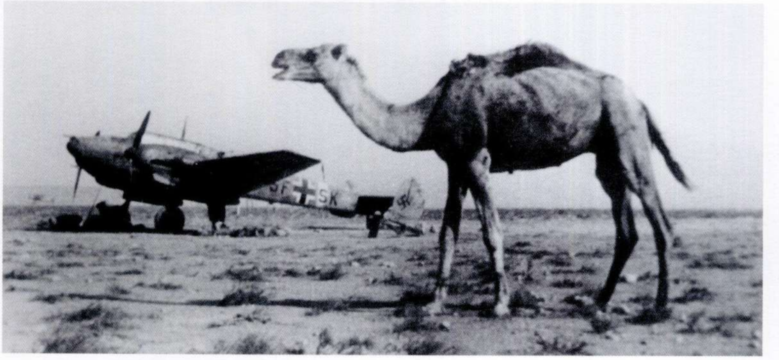
ABOVE: Flying personnel of Aufkl. Gr 14 pose on the wing of a Bf 110 of the unit. Note that this aircraft carries the unit emblem of 2./Aufkl. Gr 123, and that unit's code has been crudely overpainted on the fuselage. This aircraft does note have frame numbers painted on the fuselage, and the hatch does not carry the normal first aid marking of a red cross on a white circle, both probably painted over when the single top surface colour was applied.



ABOVE: Bf 110 E-3, 5F+OK, of 2./Auflk. Gr. 14 showing a two tone upper surface camouflage pattern, and damage to the fuselage and starboard flap.

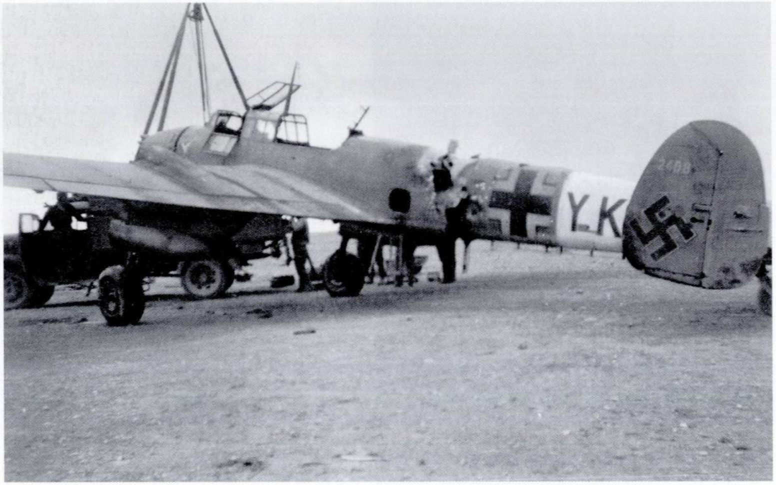


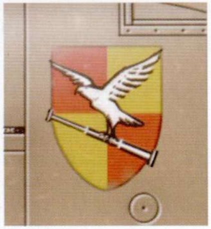
ABOVE: 5F+PK, has its theatre band behind the last character of the fuselage code. The small W. Nr. can be seen just above the swastika.

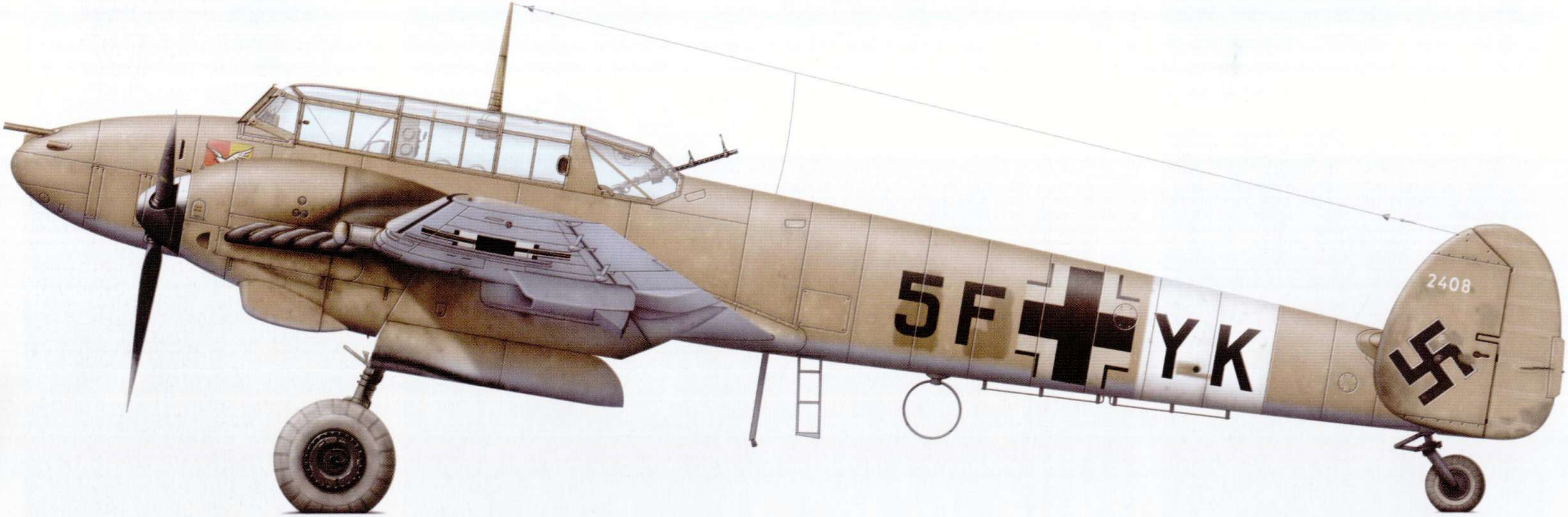


LEFT: One of the slowest, and one of the fastest, modes of transport are captured perfectly in this shot. 5F+SK has its theatre band in a different position to that of 5F+PK of the same Staffel.

Bf 110 E-3, 5F+YK, W. Nr. 2408, of Aufkl. Gr. 14, with damage to the upper fuselage. Note that the theatre band on this aircraft is twice the width of that seen in previous photos of 5F+PK and 5F+SK. On the forward fuselage the unit emblem of 2./Aufkl. Gr. 123 can be seen. It would appear that at some point Aufkl. Gr. 14 took on charge some Bf 110s from 2./Aufkl. Gr. 123 but did not bother to remove the previous unit's emblem.

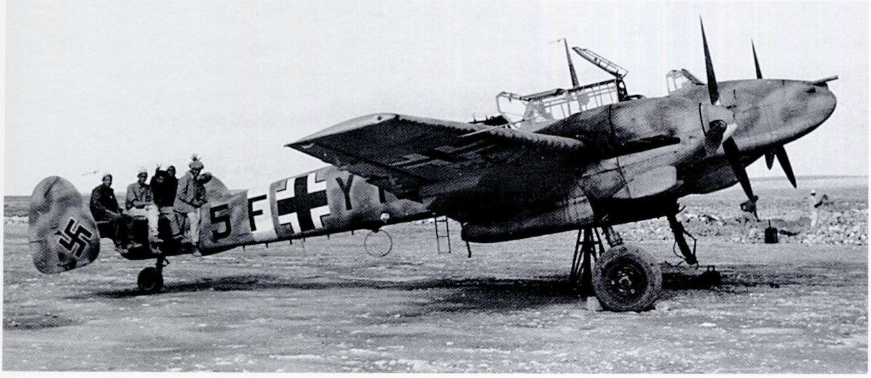






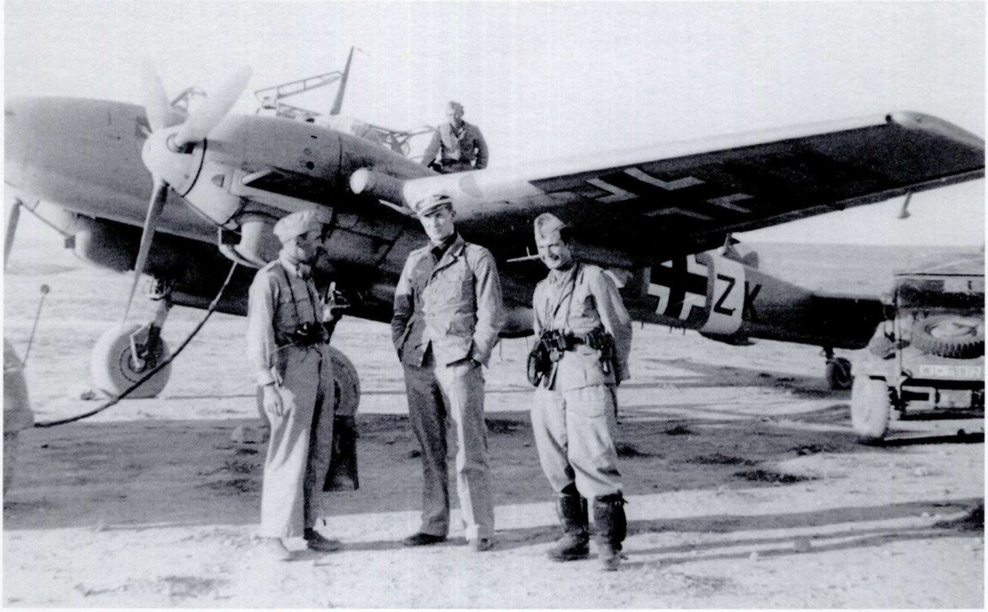
Messerschmitt Bf 110 E-3, 5F+YK, of 2./Aufkl. Gr. 14

Reconnaissance Bf 110 E-3, 5F+YK, W. Nr. 2408, of 2./Aufkl. Gr. 14. A single upper surface camouflage colour has been applied, with the previous unit's code, (4U), crudely overpainted. The theatre band on this aircraft is very wide; other Bf 110s of the Staffel in the African theatre can be seen with a thin fuselage band. The emblem is that of 2./Aufkl. Gr 123, and it would appear that the emblem was left on the aircraft when it was transferred from that unit.

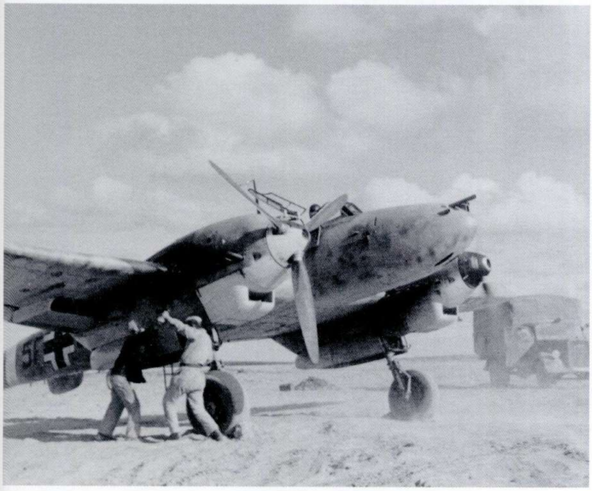


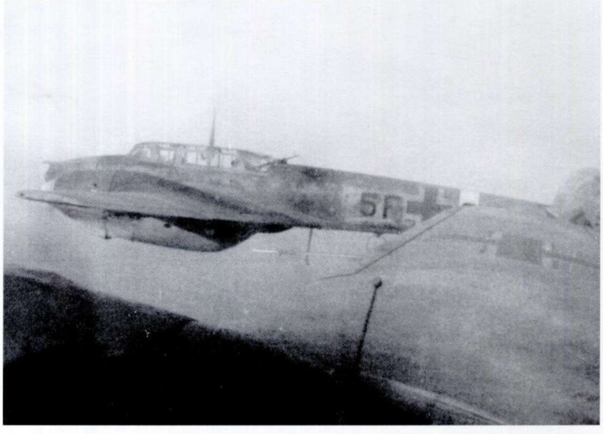
LEFT: Bf 110 E-3, 5F+YK, of Aufkl. Gr. 14. It cannot be stated with certainty that this is the same aircraft as in the previous photo. Note the armoured windscreen and the enlarged radiator, which was part of the tropical kit fitted to many Bf 110s in the African theatre.

RIGHT: 5F+ZK, a Bf 110 E-3, showing the tropical filter and enlarged radiator fitted to combat the conditions of the African theatre. The emblem of 2./Aufkl. Gr 123 remains on this Bf 110 of Aufkl. Gr. 14 also.



BELOW: With the port engine running, mechanics crank the starboard engine of this 2./Aufkl. Gr. 14 Bf 110 E-3. As in previous photos, this machine is fitted with tropical equipment. Two tone upper surface camouflage is carried, and the colour of the lower engine cowlings is noteworthy. Contrasting it with the white on the propeller spinners would suggest that this colour is yellow, or a fresh application of the light blue undersurface colour.





ABOVE: In-flight view of a very badly weathered Aufkl. Gr. 14 Bf 110 with a thin white theatre band just aft of the fuselage cross.

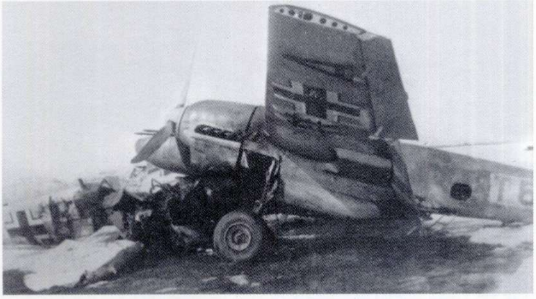
Montgomery provided clear direction for Allied forces under his control, and more importantly, had an unwavering strategy in his prosecution of the desert war: he would always ensure that sufficient supplies were received and available before undertaking any major attack on Axis forces. Coupled with that, Enigma decrypts that he would read at the same time as his opposite number ensured that at all times he knew detailed information of his enemy's situation. It was into this scenario that *III./ZG 26* and the piecemeal reconnaissance *Zerstörer* units entered in the closing months of 1942. The second Battle of El Alamein commenced on 31 August with a German attack being repulsed and forced into retreat in a number of days. By this time the *Bf 110*s of *III./ZG 26* were encountering USAAF B-24 bombers on a regular basis, the American aircraft regularly seeking out German convoys. At the end of September, *Ofw.* Haugk intercepted a formation of B-24s and returned to base to lodge claims for two of them.

As October progressed, Allied forces were building up their strength for an imminent attack, and a key part of the build-up for both sides was the safe passage of materials. As well as convoys, *Ju 52/3m* transport aircraft were used to ferry supplies to the *Afrika Korps*. Through October the *Ju 52/3m*s suffered losses when they were intercepted, despite the presence of *Bf 110* escort fighters from *III./ZG 26*.

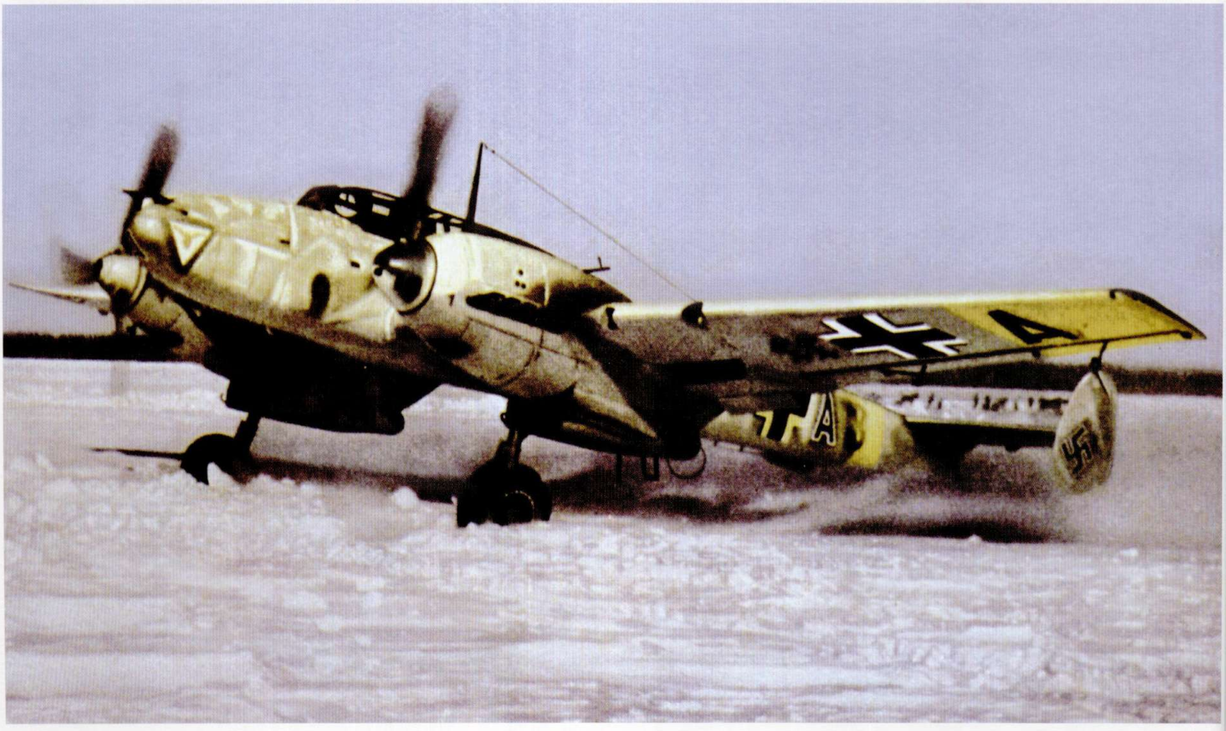
Montgomery's offensive commenced on 23 October (dubbed the Third Battle of El Alamein) and, gradually gaining the upper hand, major Allied advances had occurred by the second week in November. In the air, *III./ZG 26* were pitched into the battle, carrying out bombing and strafing attacks, but their effort was unable to significantly change the course of events. The Allied advance finally came to a halt on 27 November, before resuming on 13 December. A heavy loss hit *III./ZG 26* on 4 December when a *Ju 52/3m* was shot down. This particular transport was carrying ground personnel, and the sudden loss of this valuable backup resource to the flying crews of the unit was keenly felt.

The year thus ended on a low note for German forces in the area, and, given Montgomery's single-mindedness in pursuing victory, things would not improve into 1943.

BELOW: Bf 110 E-3, T6+AA, of the Geschwaderstab of StG. 2 after a rather spectacular collision with a Bf 109. The unit code has either been masked out while the upper surface camouflage was applied, or a crude application of paint has obscured a previous code for the purpose of applying the unit code 'T6'.



BELOW: Bf 110 E, A5+AB of the Gruppenstab of I./SG 1 clearly showing yellow lower wingtips and a yellow band around the rear fuselage. The central bomb rack has been removed, although the wing bomb racks are still in place.



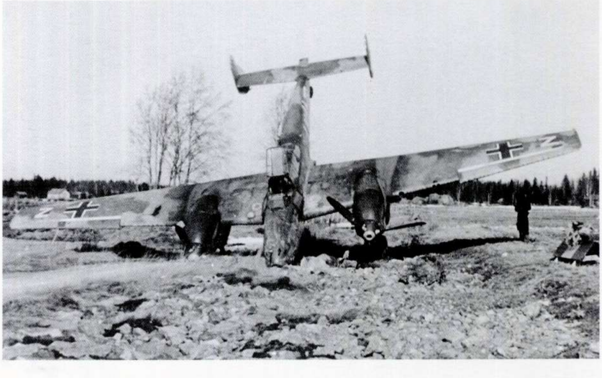
The Russian Front – 1942

On the far northern front, *1.(Z)/JG 77* continued missions in January of the new year, with regular attacks on the Murmansk railway facilities. Its opponents in the air were changing, however. New fighters were gradually being brought into service by the Russians, the MiG-3 and the LaGG-3 gradually replacing the obsolete Ratas and I-153s. Additionally, with assistance from the Allies, Hawker Hurricanes, P-39 Airacobras and P-40 Tomahawks began to appear alongside Russian-built fighters. With a reorganisation of *JG 5* taking place on 1 February, *1.(Z)/JG 77* was re-designated *6.(Z)/JG 5*. In the forthcoming months the name of the *Staffel* would change twice: on 16 March to *10.(Z)/JG 5,* and by 22 June the designation *13.(Z)/JG 5* appeared in the *Staffel*'s loss list for the first time. With *Oblt.* Felix Brandis on leave, *Oblt.* Horst Carganico led the *Zerstörerstaffel* during its first change of designation. Returning from leave on 1 February, Brandis led the *Staffel* on a mission on 2 February. Deteriorating weather meant that he had to divert the *Staffel* to Kiestinki, but upon finding that that airfield was closed due to inclement weather, Brandis led the *Staffel* to Rovaniemi, with tragic consequences. Flying at low level, *Oblt.* Brandis and *Oblt.* Franzisket misjudged their height and their *Bf 110*s hit the ground. Brandis was killed when his aircraft overturned. His *Bordfunker* was lucky to escape badly wounded. *Oblt* Franzisket and his *Bordfunker* were wounded, but survived the ordeal. Following the loss of Brandis, *Oblt.* Franzisket took over temporary command of the *Staffel*, but eventually *Oblt.* Karl Fritz Schlossstein was confirmed as the new *Staffelkapitän.*

Missions continued throughout February, a mixture still of escort to bombers and ground-attack sorties against the railway complex at Murmansk and other targets in the vicinity. Franzisket had to belly-land his *Bf 110 E-2* on 23 February following a hit from flak, and after destroying the machine, he and *Bordfunker Uffz.* Harry Pitack returned to the unit. After operating out of Rovaniemi and Kiestinki for a time, the *Staffel* transferred back to Kirkenes on 26 February.

In March, while carrying out several missions, the only one to stand out was on 11 March when the six *Bf 110*s of the *Staffel* undertook an attack on the Russian airfield of Murmaschi. They were intercepted by 15 to 20 Russian fighters, a mixture of Hurricanes, MiG-3s and P-40s. With two aircraft damaged and one shot down, with the crew of *Uffz.* Emil Groß, pilot, and *Bordfunker Uffz.* Gerhard Sarodnik being wounded but surviving, the more modern Russian fighters had started to take a higher toll of the *Staffel's* machines. Throughout March and April *10.(Z)/JG 5* continued to fly escort missions for bombers and attacks on Russian targets, with *Ofw.* Weissenberger adding steadily to his victory tally, claiming eight in April. All was not one-sided, however. Weissenberger claimed two victories on 25 April but had his starboard engine set on fire by return fire from a Pe-2, and just managed to reach the safety of German lines before making a belly-landing.

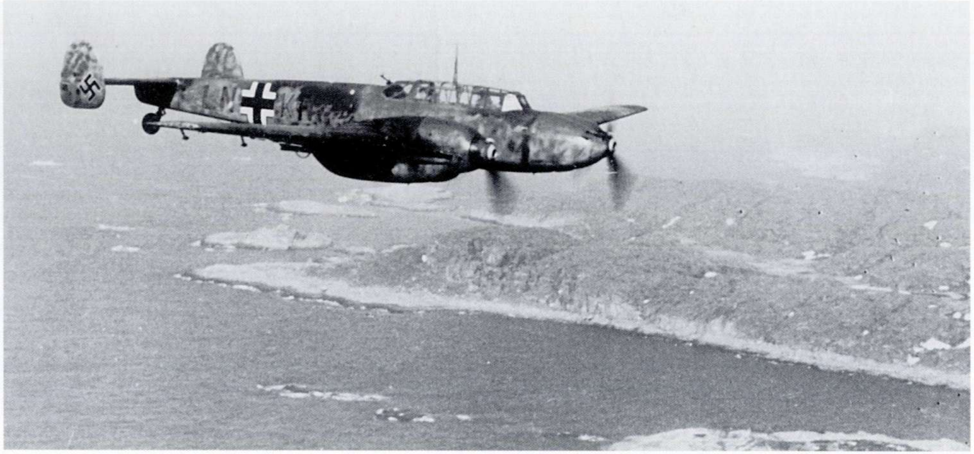
BELOW: LN+ZR in the 'Kopfstand' position gives an excellent view of the whole of the upper surface camouflage pattern applied to a Bf 110.

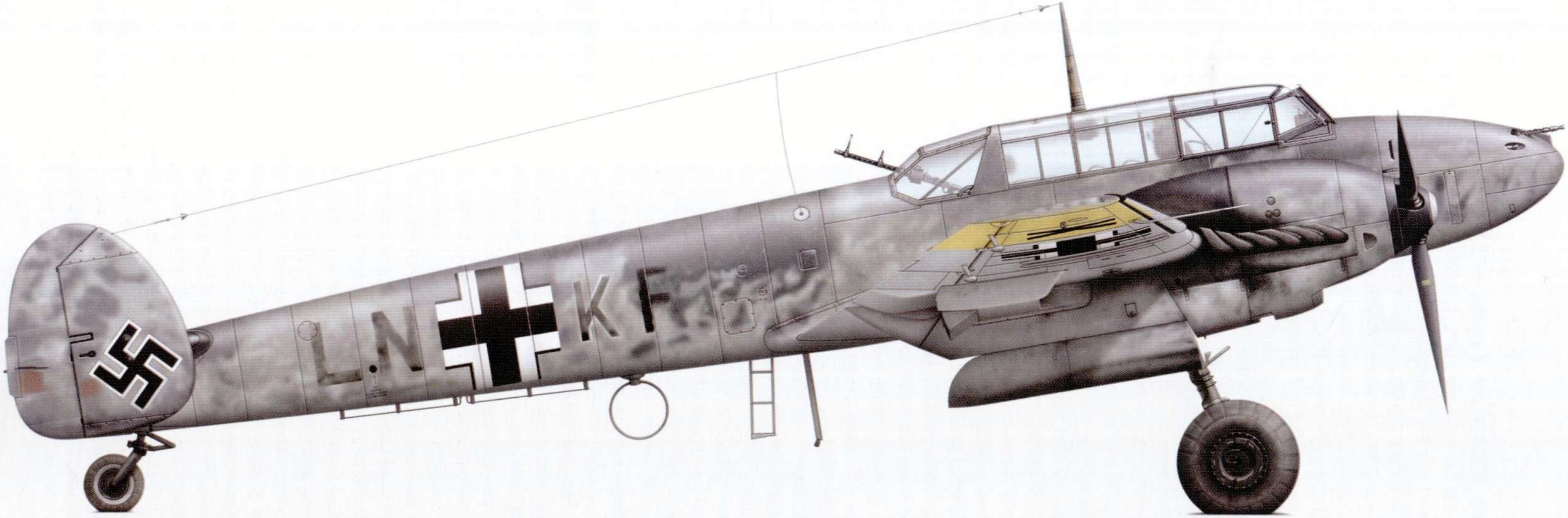


Victory scores for the *Zerstörerstaffel* in the far northern sector were nowhere near those of the units operating on the central and southern sectors of the Russian Front. By the beginning of May, the *Staffel*'s score stood at 27. Another feature of the far northern front was that for the *Luftwaffe* units, the front was far more static. Whereas *ZG 26* and *SKG 210* had constantly moved bases in 1941, the *Zerstörerstaffel* had operated from two main bases, and into 1942 there was little change to that situation.

May also saw the introduction of the new *Bf 110* variant, the 'F-2' to *10.(Z)/JG 5,* which was brought into service alongside the 'E' variants and the odd 'D' still on charge. Missions continued out of Kirkenes, the *Staffel* flying not only escort missions, but increasingly interceptions of Russian bombers heading for the German lines, and engaging intercepting Russian fighters. 10 May, for example, saw the *Staffel* locked in combat with a force of about 25 MiG-3 and Hurricane fighters during an escort mission for Ju 87s. A further mission escorting Ju 87s once again that day had the same result, with the balance firmly in favour of the *Bf 110*s with claims for at least 15 enemy fighters being lodged. The pattern of missions continued in the forthcoming weeks, during which the change of designation to *13.(Z)/JG 5* took place. The only loss to occur was the crew of *Lt.* Harry Kripphal, pilot, and *Ofw.* Erich Kulik, *Bordfunker*, shot down in *Bf 110 E-2*, LN+LR by flak on 18 June and posted missing.

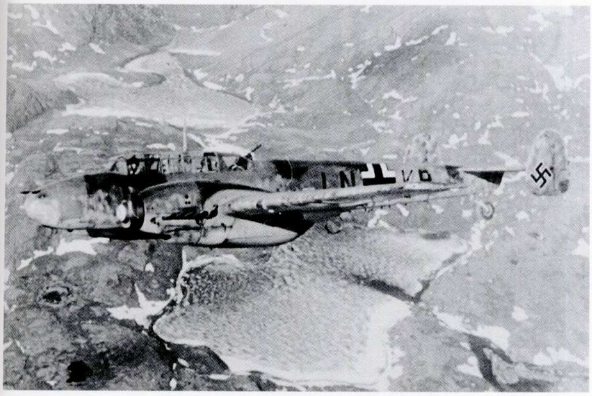
Bf 110 E, LN+KR of the Zerstörerstaffel of JG 5. Note that the application of upper surface camouflage has obscured part of the letter 'R' in the fuselage code.



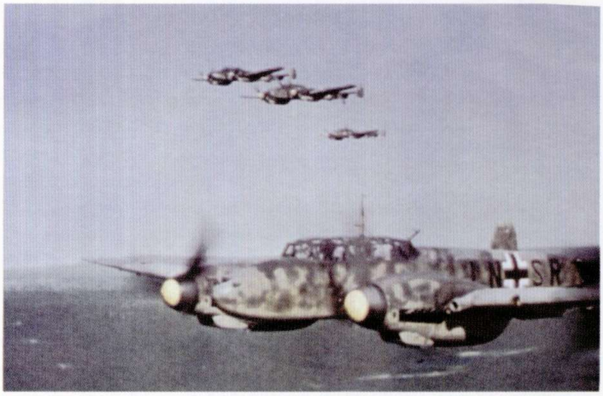


Messerschmitt Bf 110 E of the Zerstörerstaffel/JG 5

As with a previous profile, this Bf 110 E, LN+KR, of the Zerstörerstaffel of JG 5 has had a re-application of its upper surface camouflage that has overlapped the fuselage code in parts. No attempt has been made to touch up the fuselage code following the repainting. LN+KR shows a good contrast between the two upper surface colours, with mottle being applied further down the fuselage conforming to the respective areas of the two colours. Yellow undersurface wingtips, a common feature of the Bf 110s of the Zerstörerstaffel of JG 5, an armoured windscreen, and the scissors link on the tailwheel can all be seen.



ABOVE: Excellent in-flight view of LN+KR of the Zerstörerstaffel of JG 5 in June 1942. In that month, the Staffel's designation was changed from 10.(Z)/JG 5 to 13.(Z)/JG 5. This view shows to excellent effect the strong contrast between the upper surface camouflage colours. This bf 110 does not carry the Staffel emblem of a Rata in the jaws of a Dackel.



ABOVE: Bf 110 F-2, LN+SR, of 13.(Z)/JG 5 displaying yellow tips to the propeller spinners. Of interest is the high contrast in the upper surface camouflage colours on the nose and the rear fuselage of the aircraft.

In the summer months war reporters were attached to the *Staffel*, their role being to take part in missions with the *Staffel* and provide glowing reports of operations against the enemy. On one such mission war reporter Hans Kuhnke was assigned to the crew of *Lt.* Hans-Bodo von Rabenau and his *Bordfunker Uffz.* Karl-Fritz Schröder. Von Rabenau and Schröder had previously flown with *3./ZG 1* before being transferred to *13.(Z)/JG 5* following a disciplinary matter. On 10 June von Rabenau had to carry out a wheels-up landing in a cornfield following a combat mission with *3./ZG 1*. When the aircraft was examined by ground mechanics it was found that the two fin/rudder locks were still in place. These obviously should have been removed, and it was von Rabenau's responsibility as pilot to check that his aircraft was in full flying condition before take-off. He was grounded for a week as a result. Karl-Fritz Schröder was similarly grounded for a week. That, and the transfer did not please Schröder, as he felt he was blameless. von Rabenau's *Bf 110 F-2*, LN+MR, flying an escort mission for *Ju 88*s on 13 August, was attacked by P-40s and was so badly damaged that von Rabenau gave the order to bale out. Kuhnke and Schröder baled out successfully, but von Rabenau was still in the aircraft when it crashed. Kuhnke was found by *Bf 110*s flying a search patrol, and was picked up and returned safely to Kirkenes. Schröder spent several days behind Russian lines before reaching the safety of the German sector again.

During the many escort and bombing missions undertaken in the following weeks, two crews were lost. On 2 September the *Bf 110 F-2* LN+NR crashed on return from a mission, killing the crew, and two days later, ferrying a new *Bf 110 F-2* to the unit, the crew of *Uffz.* Bruno Assmuss, pilot, and his *Bordfunker*, *Gefr.* Erwin Härtel, was posted as missing; no trace of them or their machine was ever found. September saw no further losses for the *Staffel*, and from then until the end of the year, with the *Staffel* in continuous action, only one further loss was recorded, and that was on a non-combat flight. On 24 October, on a flight from Petsamo to Kirkenes, *Uffz.* Karl Michels, with a civilian worker from Daimler-Benz on board following a test flight, in LN+CR crashed 20 km west of Petsamo, both occupants being killed.

Before the end of the year the *Staffel* left Kirkenes and moved to Kemijärvi, in Lappland. It would not return to Kirkenes until the following February.

Meanwhile, in May 1942, in advance of *I./ZG 1* returning to the Russian Front, Wolfgang Schenck was summoned to the headquarters of the commander of VIII. *Fliegerkorps*, *General* Wolfram von Richthofen. Schenck was advised that the *Gruppe*'s base upon return to the front would be Belgorod, between Kharkov and Kursk. Immediately, this troubled Schenck. He asked for information regarding the navigational and magnetic situation of the area. Those present thought he was crazy. However, away from von Richthofen's headquarters, Schenck enquired of friends he had in the scientific field back in Germany. Sure enough, the reply came back that in the region there was what was called the 'Kursk Anomaly'. A massive iron ore deposit over 160 metres below ground played havoc with compasses, giving false readings of up to 30°. This was first noticed in 1773 by the astronomer Peter Inokhodtsev, and the mystery finally resolved in 1923 by the academic Ivan Gubkin. The senior officers knew nothing of this phenomenon. The consequences would soon be seen. On 19 June, following a staff meeting in Kharkov, a senior army staff officer, *Major* Reichel, together with four other officers took off in a *Ju 52/3m* to return to Kursk with all the major documentation for the forthcoming summer offensive. The aircraft inexplicably strayed over Russian lines and was never seen again. Later, the *Adjutant* of *I./ZG 1, Lt.* Kohler, leading a section of *Bf 110*s of the unit, believing he was flying over

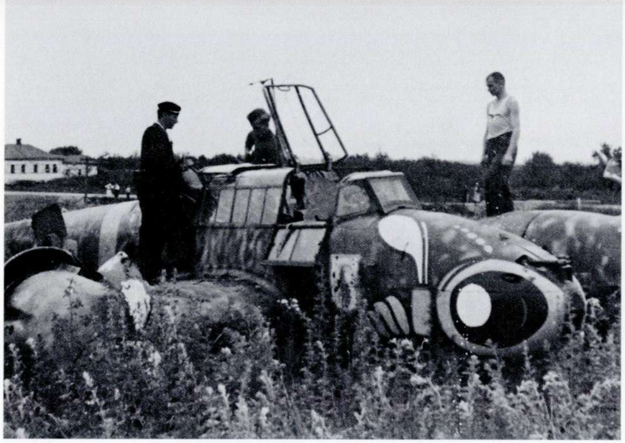
German lines and therefore taking no precautions, was easily shot down over Russian lines by a flak battery at a height of 500 metres. This was no novice pilot, but an experienced pilot officer.

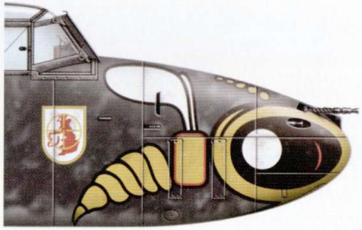
ZG 1 could trace its history back to *JG 132* 'Richthofen' in the mid-1930s. The 'Richthofen-Tradition' was carried proudly throughout the various changes in name, despite *JG 2* carrying the title 'Richthofen'. *ZG 1*, and *SKG 210* before it, had always been in the thick of the action on the Russian Front, and were always prepared to scout the front line to see where their presence was most needed. This sometimes led the unit to flying missions in support of the army against particular Russian strongholds, which were contrary to orders issued from the headquarters of *General* Wolfram von Richthofen's *VIII. Fliegerkorps*. It was a case of the headquarters of *VIII. Fliegerkorps* being completely out of touch with the true situation on the ground, but it set von Richthofen against the *Wespengeschwader. Geschwaderkommodore Major* Ulrich Diesing telephoned the unit one day in June 1942 from Berlin. "Do you still carry the Richthofen-Tradition?" The reply was affirmative. He then went on to explain that von Richthofen had arranged with the General Staff of the *Luftwaffe* that only two *Zerstörer Gruppen* would remain in existence, and the first two *Gruppen* to be disbanded would be *I.* and *II. ZG 1.* Their men and machines would be transferred to other units. Diesing told the *Wespengeschwader* to get all machines to Konstantinowka, whether they were serviceable or not, and to recall immediately any personnel away on leave or recovering from combat injuries. Diesing would issue the invitations for the ceremony to mark the end of the 'Richthofen Tradition' unit. Issuing the invitations had the desired effect. When Göring got his invitation, he sent one of his staff officers to *ZG 1*'s headquarters on the Russian Front, and he told the unit to cancel the ceremony immediately. *ZG 1* would remain in existence. Göring had taken over the leadership of Manfred von Richthofen's *Staffel* when that famous pilot was killed in action in April 1918. The 'Richthofen Tradition' ran deep in Göring's psyche. Apparently Wolfram von Richthofen was not aware of the 'Richthofen-Tradition' being vested in the *Wespengeschwader*. He was not, however, very impressed at being out-manoeuvred by the officers of *ZG 1*. von Richthofen's next move was to send poor quality, sometimes damaged, machines to *ZG 1*, expecting that there would be complaints, and he would be able to move against those who voiced them. Some of them would be old *Bf 110*s previously used on towing duties for large transport aircraft used by the Luftwaffe. The unit was able to see through this ploy, and quietly repaired these machines to full flying condition and took them on charge. However von Richthofen had one more ace to play. *ZG 1* had been provided with only about 50 per cent of the transport required for a unit of its size. By fair means or foul, the unit had acquired more stock so that they could continue to function efficiently. In response, von Richthofen ordered that since it appeared that *ZG 1* had too much transport capacity, they must, in future, partake of the general service provision of transport across all flying units. Diesing replied that *ZG 1* would willingly agree to such a proposal, since, of all the units on the Russian Front, *ZG 1* had the smallest official allocation of transport. He therefore asked if he could be advised of when he could expect additional transport for his unit. Nothing more was heard of the proposal. These are just some examples of the unnecessary problems encountered by a fighting unit from senior staff seeking to exercise their power over them.

Both *Gruppen* of *ZG 1* returned to the Russian Front at the end of May, now equipped with the new 'F' variant of the *Bf 110*, which it operated alongside the earlier variants. The re-equipping with the new variant, and the return to the Russian Front, was not without mishap, however. On 29 May, on the transfer flight back to the Front, the *Bf 110 F-2*, S9+LL, of *Oblt.* Georg Boxhammer, *Staffelkapitän* of *3. Staffel* crashed after port engine failure and Boxhammer and the other two occupants were killed. On the same day, another *Bf 110 F-2* carrying a crew of three suffered engine failure, and all were wounded in the crash that followed. The following day was to be even worse for *I. Gruppe* when two *Bf 110 F-2/Trop*s, S9+GL and S9+JL crashed, both suffering port engine failure. All six occupants were killed. As with *13.(Z)/JG 5*, the *Wespengruppen* were experiencing serious problems with the engines fitted to the new 'F' variants.

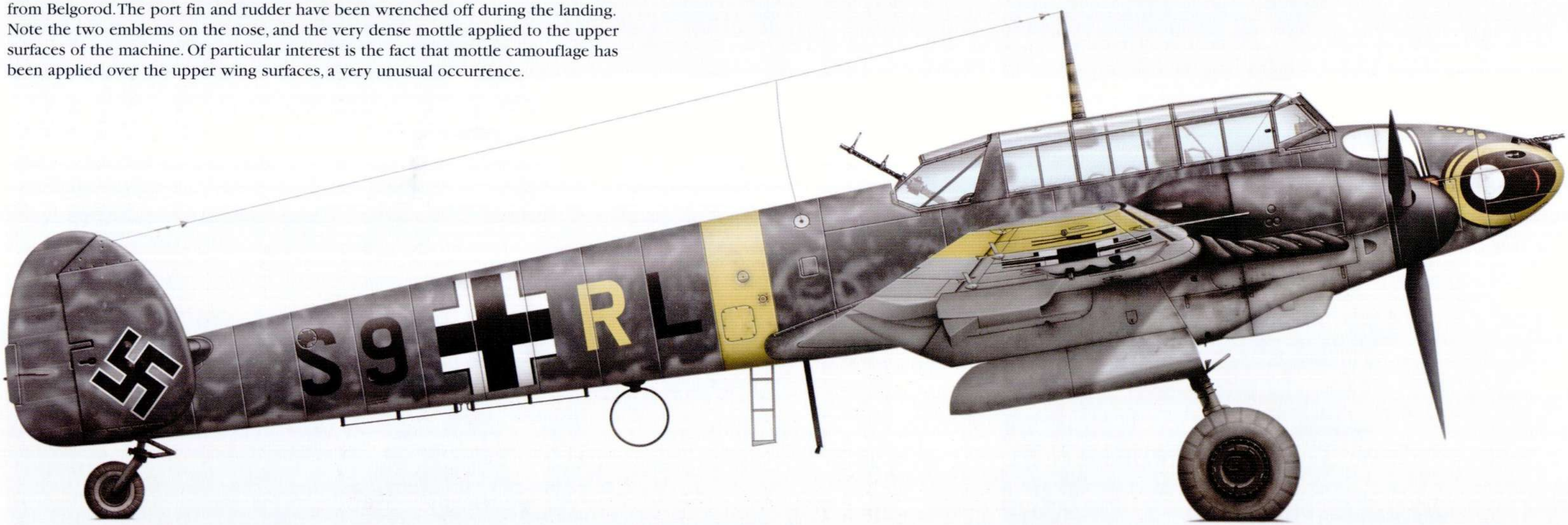
ZG 1's two *Gruppen* were back in action within weeks of their return to Russia, this time joined by a *III. Gruppe* flying *Bf 109 E-7* fighter-bombers. Initially based at Belgorod, in early July *I. Gruppe* was operating out of Konstantinowka, while *II. Gruppe* was based at Belaja-Glina. Their sphere of operations was far to the south of where they had operated in 1941.

While operating from Konstantinowka *I. Gruppe* carried out attacks as far east as Voroshilovgrad, before moving to Kuteinikowo on 19 July. From there missions were carried out to the south in the Rostov area, before moving again on 25 July to Lakademinowka, far closer to the Rostov area. During intensive operations in July casualties were light for *I. Gruppe*, with four crewmen wounded on combat





Two views of Bf 110 F-2, S9+RL, of Uffz. Wilhelm Tögel, which crashed on take-off from Belgorod. The port fin and rudder have been wrenched off during the landing. Note the two emblems on the nose, and the very dense mottle applied to the upper surfaces of the machine. Of particular interest is the fact that mottle camouflage has been applied over the upper wing surfaces, a very unusual occurrence.



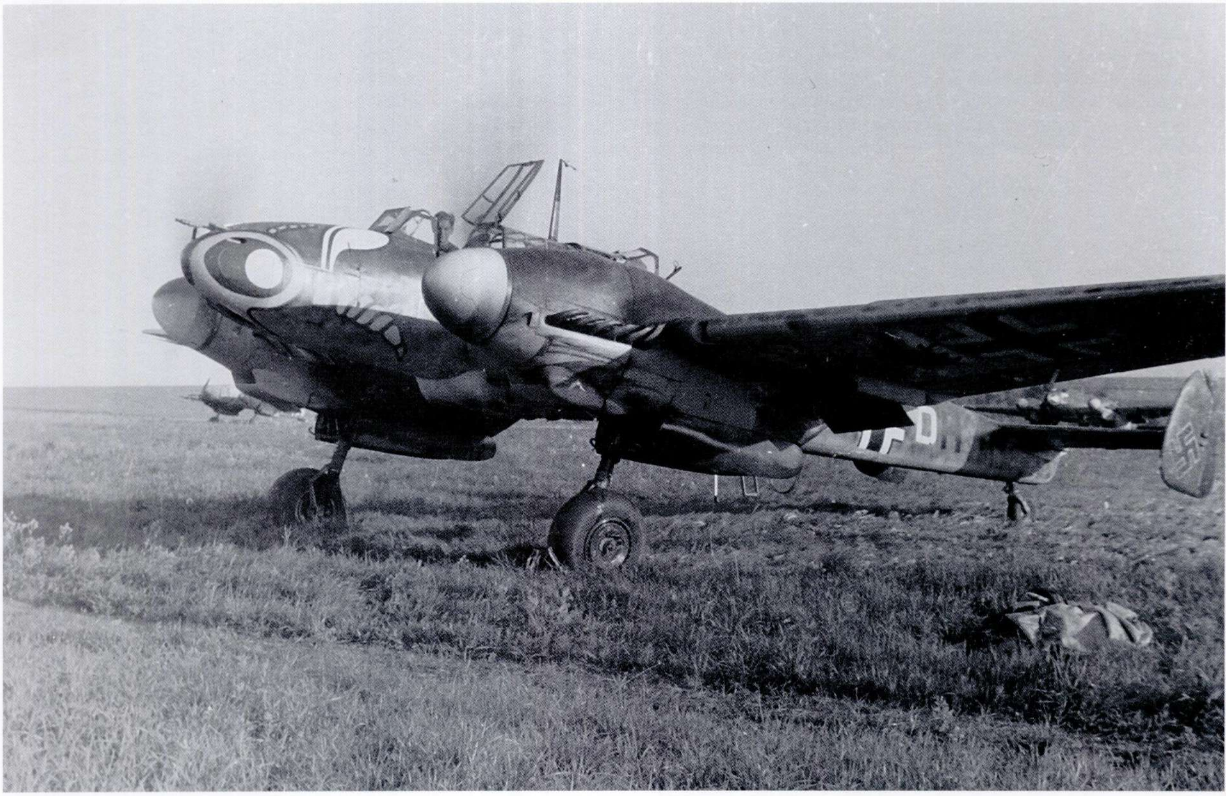
Messerschmitt Bf 110 F-2, S9+RL, of 3./ZG 1

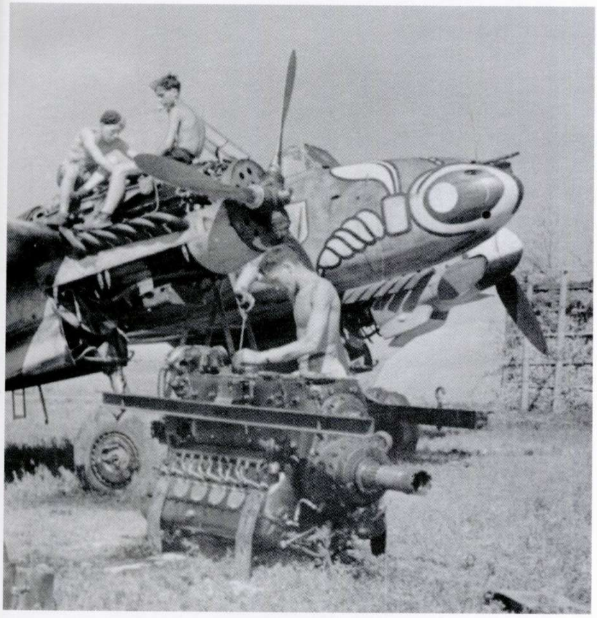
Bf 110 F-2, S9+RL, of 3./ZG 1. It has a very dense pattern of mottle camouflage over the upper surfaces. Standard features for this Staffel include the yellow Russian theatre band placed immediately aft of the wing root, and the removal of the Bordfunker's central rear canopy.

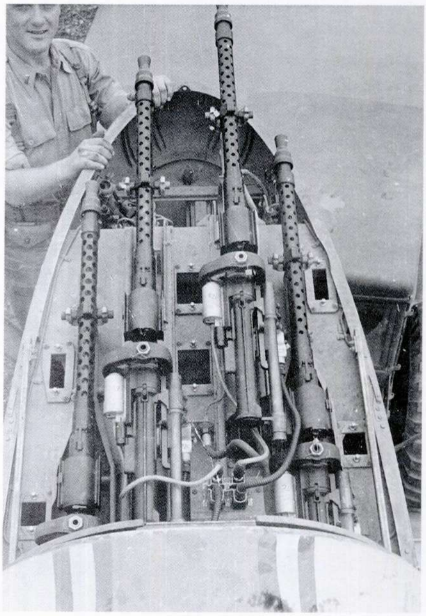
ABOVE: Seen on the Russian front, personnel of 1./ZG 1 gather to celebrate Rudolf Scheffel's 200th mission.

ABOVE: This house was used by I./ZG 1 as its Gruppe headquarters on the Russian front at Konstantinowka during July 1942. There appears to be a watch tower built onto the side of the building.

BELOW: A ground mechanic runs up the engines of S9+DH, a Bf 110 F-2 of 1./ZG 1. Note the densely applied mottle camouflage on the top surfaces, and what appears to be solid camouflage on the engine cowling. The whole of the spinners apart from the backplate are in white, and fuselage and wing bomb racks can be seen. The individual aircraft letter 'D' is white and appears to have no outline to it.







LEFT: Rarely seen view of the four machine guns in the nose of a Bf 110, in this case from ZG 1.

ABOVE: Mechanics of ZG 1 preparing a Bf 110 F for an engine change. Note the supports holding the engine clear of the ground, and the two horizontal bars with hooks which were in place on the crated engine for initial ease of movement. Ground crew used attachment points on the engine to lift it by crane into position once it had been removed from its crate, as can been seen in later photographs.

missions, and a solitary death occurring when *Bf 110 E-1*, S9+TL, crashed on take-off on a non-combat flight resulting in the pilot being killed and the *Bordfunker* wounded. By the end of July, the *Gruppe* was based at Rostov as the German advance continued apace.

II/ZG 1 was operating in the same area in July, flying from Belaja-Glina initially, then moving to Taganrog in the same month before joining its *I. Gruppe* colleagues at Rostov at the beginning of August. The month of July started badly for *6. Staffel* when, on 2 July, a *Bf 110* was shot down by Russian flak and the crew killed by partisans. *4. Staffel* had a *Bf 110* shot down on 13 July, the *Bordfunker* being killed, but the pilot, *Lt.* Joachim Hacker, returning to the unit. Low-level attacks continued to take a toll on machines. On the same day *Bf 110 E-1*, S9+EN was hit by flak and force landed with 50 per cent damage, the crew of *Ofw.* Wilhelm Dibowski, pilot, and *Uffz.* Kurt Meier, *Bordfunker*, surviving the landing. Dibowski and Meier both survived the war, continuing their wartime friendship at the '*Wespen*' reunions in the 1980s and 1990s.

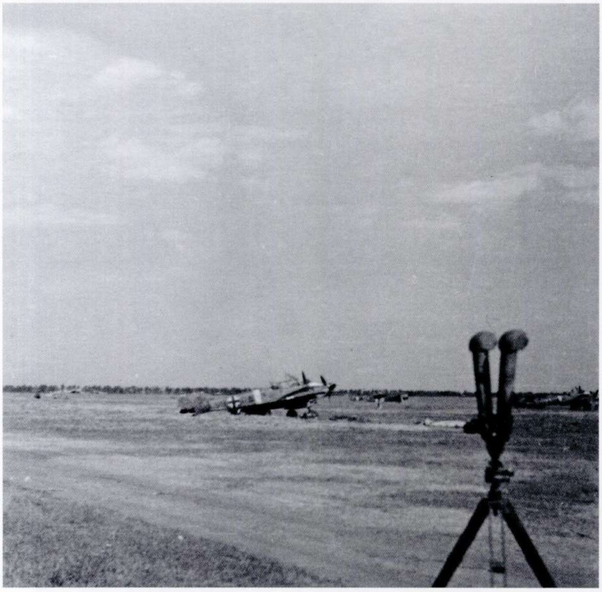
The tempo of missions continued into August, *II. Gruppe* suffering hardest in the early part of the month, with *4. Staffel* having a *Bordfunker* killed in action on the 5th; *5. Staffel* losing a crew to Russian flak on the 6th, and *6. Staffel* also losing a crew to flak on a low-level attack on the 8th. On the following day *6. Staffel* had another *Bf 110* shot down by flak, but the crew on this occasion survived to return to the *Staffel*. *I. Gruppe* had come through the early part of the month unscathed, but on 11 August *1. Staffel* had two *Bf 110*s shot down by Russian fighters, one crew killed in action, the other declared missing. Later in the month, on 21 August, *1. Staffel* suffered an unfortunate loss when *Bf 110 E-1*, S9+SH, of *Fw.* Adolf Gross and *Uffz.* Friedrich Frese was brought down when a munitions dump exploded beneath them on a low-level attack and their aircraft was fatally damaged by the flying debris. With German forces still progressing on the ground, Stalingrad was in sight when, on 25 August, a *Bf 110 F-2*, S9+AB, of the *I. Gruppe Stab* was shot down 30 km west-north-west of the city. This particular *Bf 110* carried a crew of three: as well as the pilot, *Lt.* Heinrich Dankworth, and *Bordfunker Uffz.* Georg Reuther, *Oblt.* Gerhard Hoffmann, a member of the unit's ground personnel, was also on board. All three were killed when the *Bf 110* was hit by Russian flak.

September continued in the same vein for both *Gruppen*. From 22 August, *I. Gruppe* occupied Frolow airfield, and would operate out of it for a full month. From there it would attack targets to the north and south of Stalingrad. *II. Gruppe* occupied Armavir and Krasnodar during September. Low level attacks were still the order of the day, with a number of damaged aircraft getting back to German lines, as well as the inevitable losses. One loss, on 19 September, occurred when a Bf 110 of *5. Staffel* was rammed by a Russian fighter, a relatively rare occurrence for the *Wespengeschwader*. *I. Gruppe* was hard hit in the middle of the month, when it lost two *Staffelkapitäne* in as many days. On 18 September, *Oblt.* Robert Gebhardt's *Bf 110* was hit by ground fire and crashed while returning to base, killing both occupants. Gebhardt was *Staffelkapitän* of *3. Staffel*. The following day, *Oblt.* Theo Kehl, *Staffelkapitän* of *1. Staffel*, flying *Bf 110 F-2*, S9+AH, was shot down and killed by Russian fighters. To further compound matters, another *1. Staffel* crew was shot down by Russian fighters, the crew officially listed as missing.

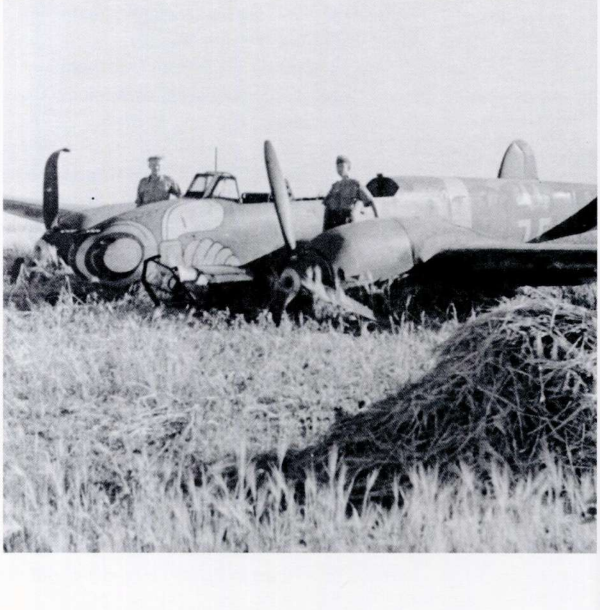
As the year drew to an end for the *Wespen Gruppen* on the Russian Front, and the ground war gradually came to a halt with the encirclement of German forces at Stalingrad, both *Gruppen* effected further moves. *I. Gruppe* occupied Obliwskaja, Tazinskaja and in December, Schachty. *II. Gruppe* meanwhile had operated out of Mozdok in October before settling in at Soldatskaja in November, a base that would see them through into the New Year. Losses continued to be suffered, and many damaged aircraft limped home in the final few weeks of the year. *'Did not return from combat mission'* became a familiar phrase in the loss returns of both *Gruppen*. The effort put in by the two *Gruppen* of the *Wespengeschwader* during the Stalingrad offensive, and their attempts to open a gap in the encirclement, is a story that has never been acknowledged, let alone told.

In October, a semi-autonomous *Staffel* came into being, designated *10./ZG 1*. This *Staffel* operated in a night fighting role to counter ever increasing nocturnal attacks by the Russian Air Force, which was gathering in strength as the campaign dragged on. The *Staffel* did produce one notable pilot: *Ofw.* Josef Kociok, who was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 31 July 1943. He was killed in action on 26 September 1943, having achieved 21 victories at night.

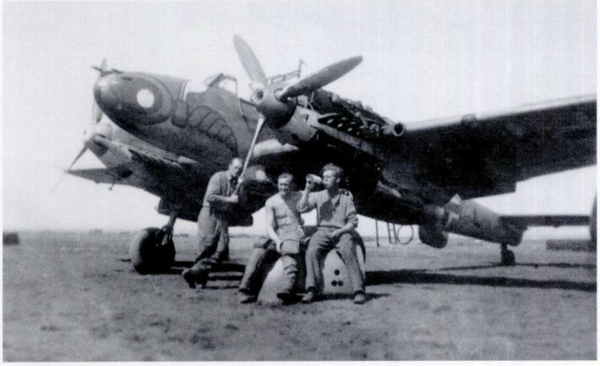
BELOW: View across an unknown airfield in 1942 showing Wespengeschwader Bf 110s.

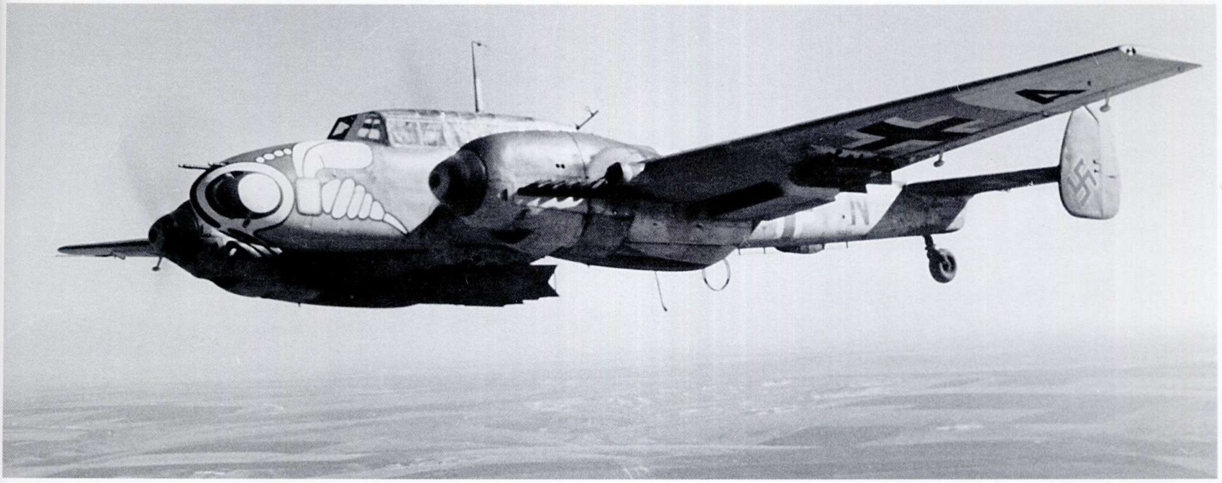


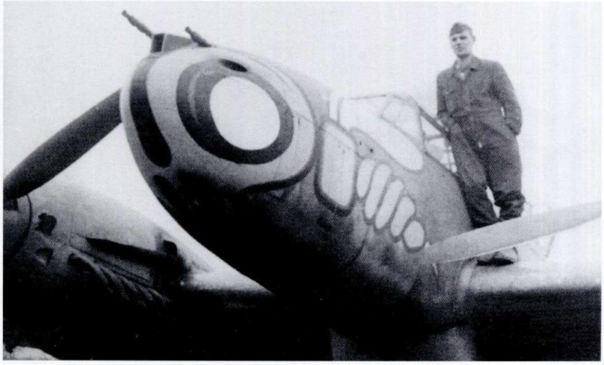
RIGHT: Crash-landed Bf 110 of ZG 1. The individual aircraft letter of 'M' can just be discerned aft of the fuselage cross. The upper surface camouflage appears to be a solid application. Note the fitment of an armoured windscreen.



BELOW: Groundcrew relax on the port engine cowling of Bf 110 E, S9+AL of 3./ZG 1. Note the two different colours to the spinner tips. The starboard tip is in the Staffel colour of yellow. The three apertures on the engine cowling are for mechanics to view dials on the engine to observe how the engine is performing.



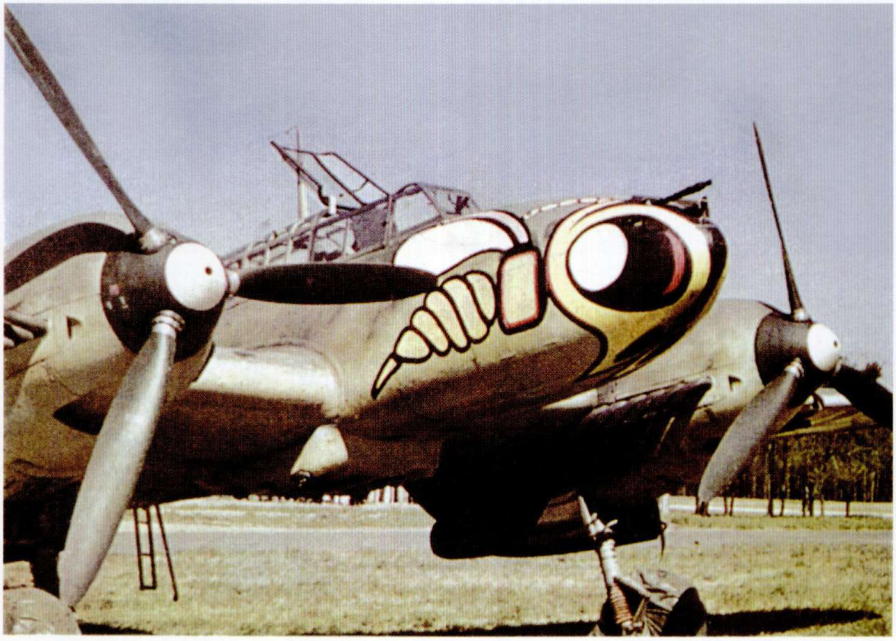


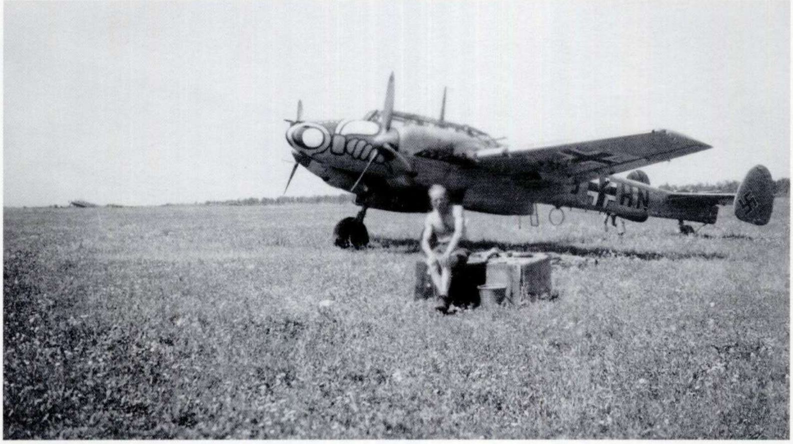


ABOVE: Excellent in-flight view of Bf 110 C-7 S9+AN of 5./ZG 1 on a mission to attack a Russian target. An armoured windscreen is fitted, and the undersurface wingtip is yellow.

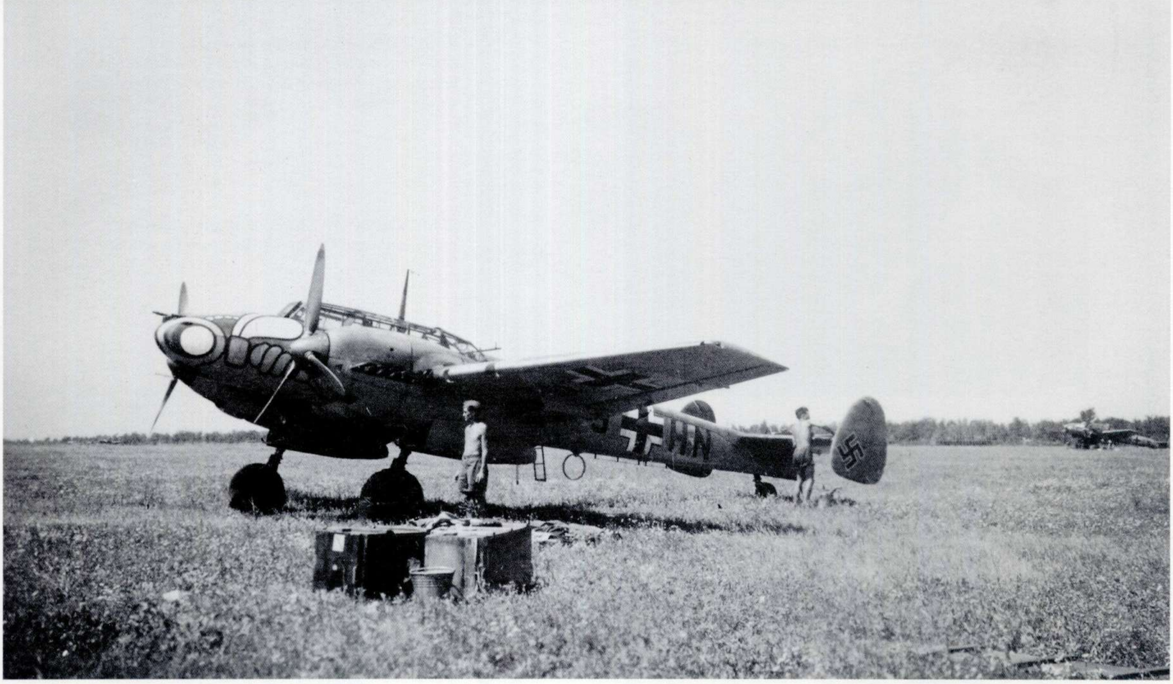
LEFT: This Bf 110 E of ZG 1 appears to have its entire starboard engine cowling painted yellow.

BELOW: Excellent colour photo of a Bf 110 E of ZG 1.

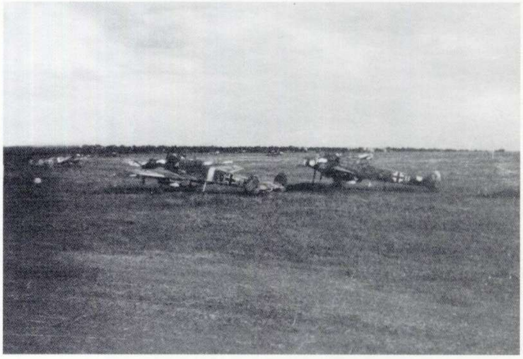


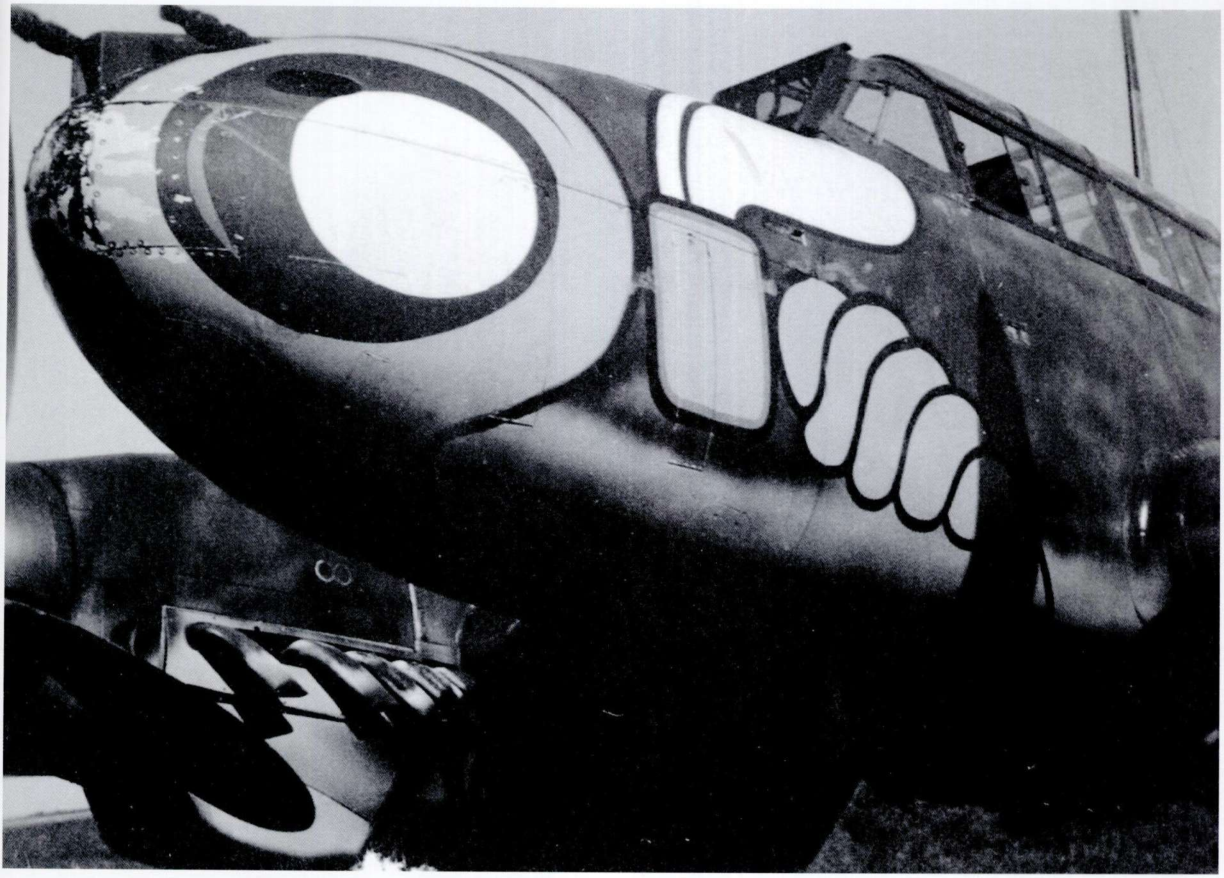


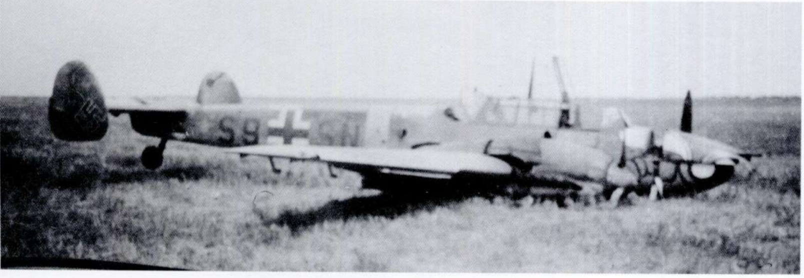
LEFT AND BELOW: Two views of S9+HN, a Bf 110 E of 5./ZG 1. Note the extended rear fuselage, and the yellow tactical marking on the lower port wingtip. An armoured windscreen is fitted, and the spinners are capped.



RIGHT: In this view of II./ZG 1 Bf 110s, S9+IN has its yellow fuselage band forward of the fuselage code; S9+UP has its band around the rear fuselage. Note the high contrast between the two camouflage colours on the wing surfaces on S9+IN and the aircraft behind it.

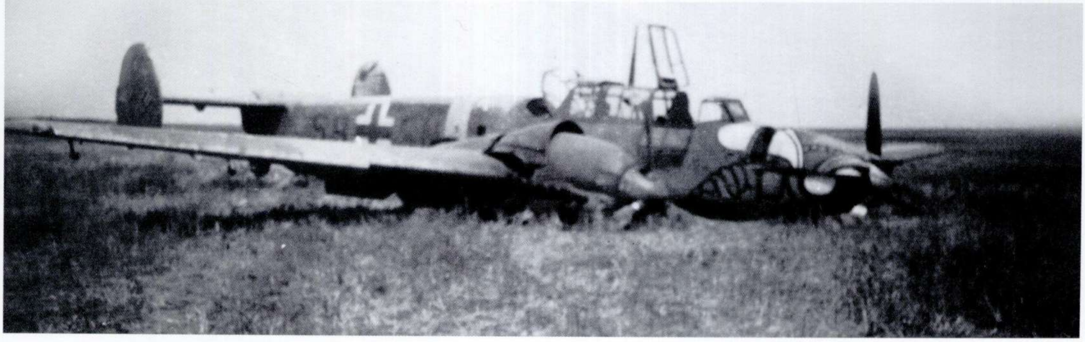


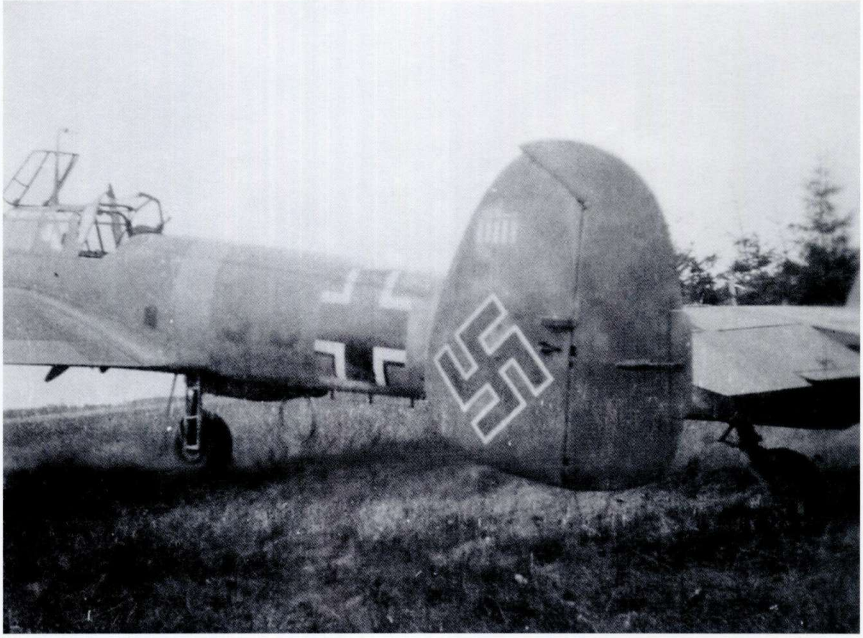




ABOVE: Close-up of the nose of a Bf 110 F of ZG 1 showing some wear on the famous 'Wespe' emblem. This view shows heavily mottled fuselage sides, the armoured windscreen, and pilot's back armour.

BELOW LEFT AND BELOW RIGHT: Two views of belly landed S9+SN of 5./ZG 1. The individual aircraft letter 'S' is in red, and the spinners are capped. The first task of groundcrew upon reaching a crashed aircraft was to remove the guns, and the Bordfunker's machine gun has already been removed from this machine.

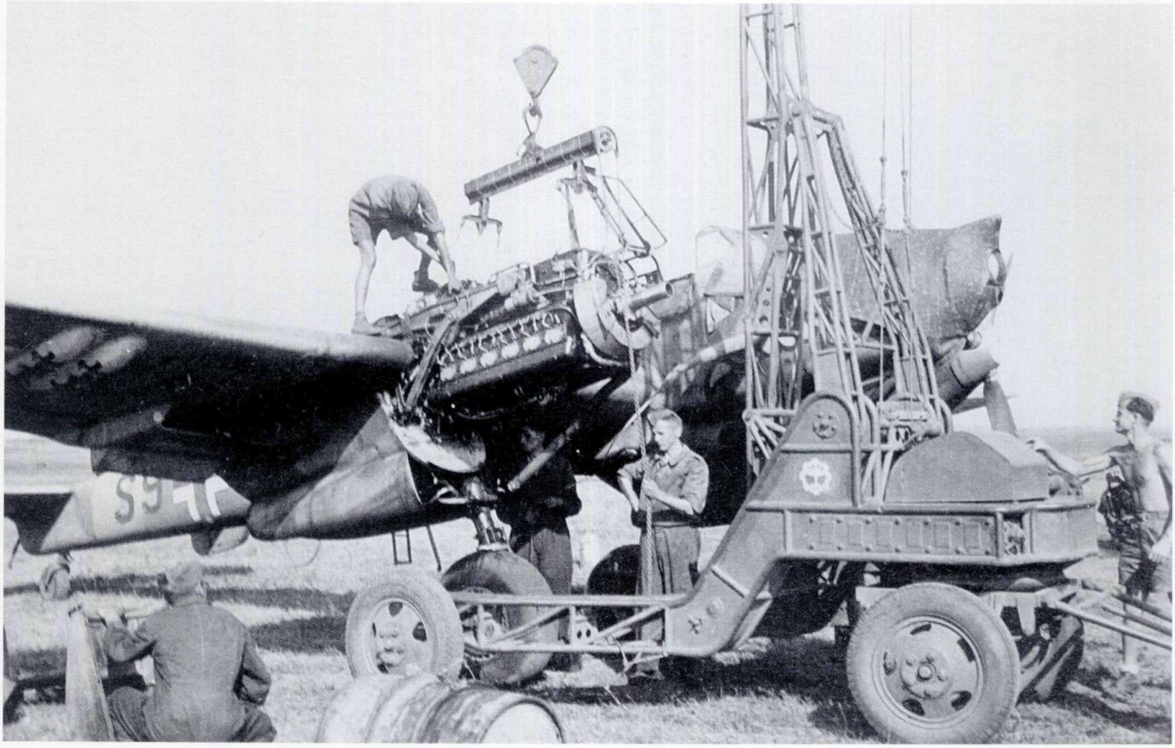


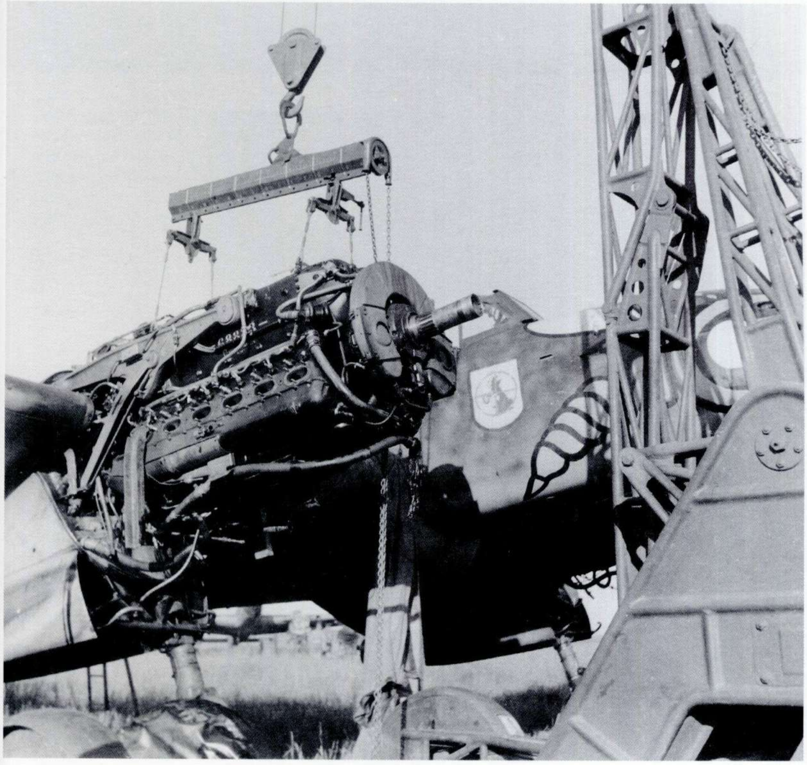


RIGHT: Five victory bars on the fin of this Bf 110 marks it out as the aircraft of an unknown 'ace' of ZG 1. The enlarged black centre of the fuselage cross was a practice normally seen on I. Gruppe Bf 110s of this unit.

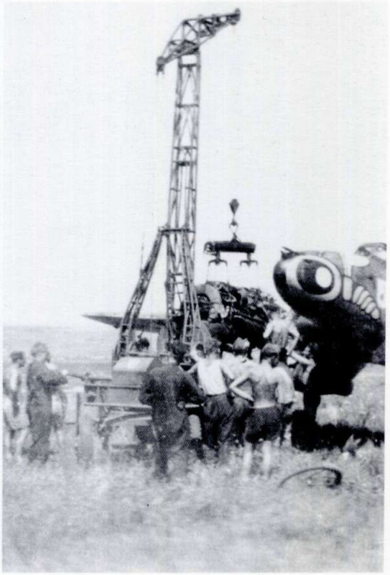
BELOW: This Wespengeschwader Bf 110 is unusual in that it does not appear to be fitted with a fuselage bomb rack.

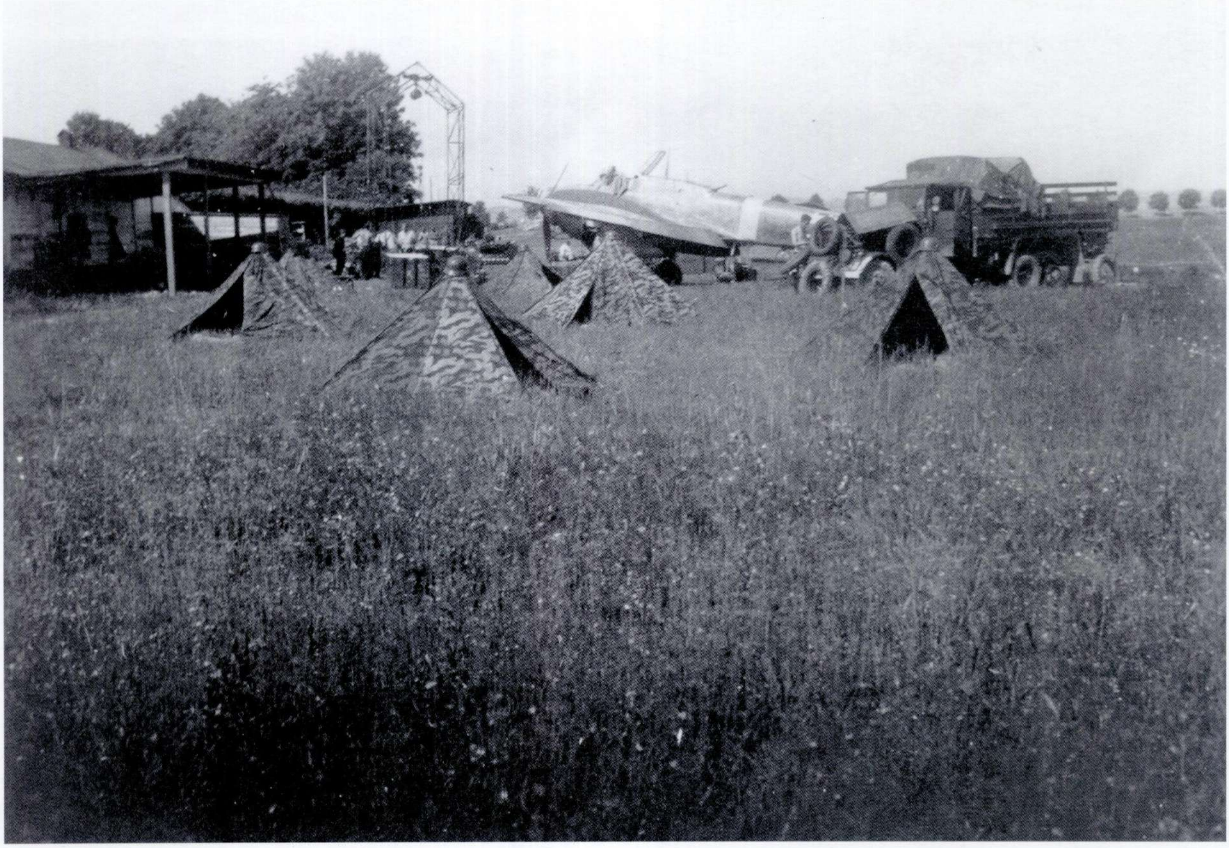
BELOW: Mission instructions to flying personnel of 5./ZG 1 on the Russian front. Not the heavily worn Wespe on the nose of the Bf 110 E, and the red tip to the spinner.

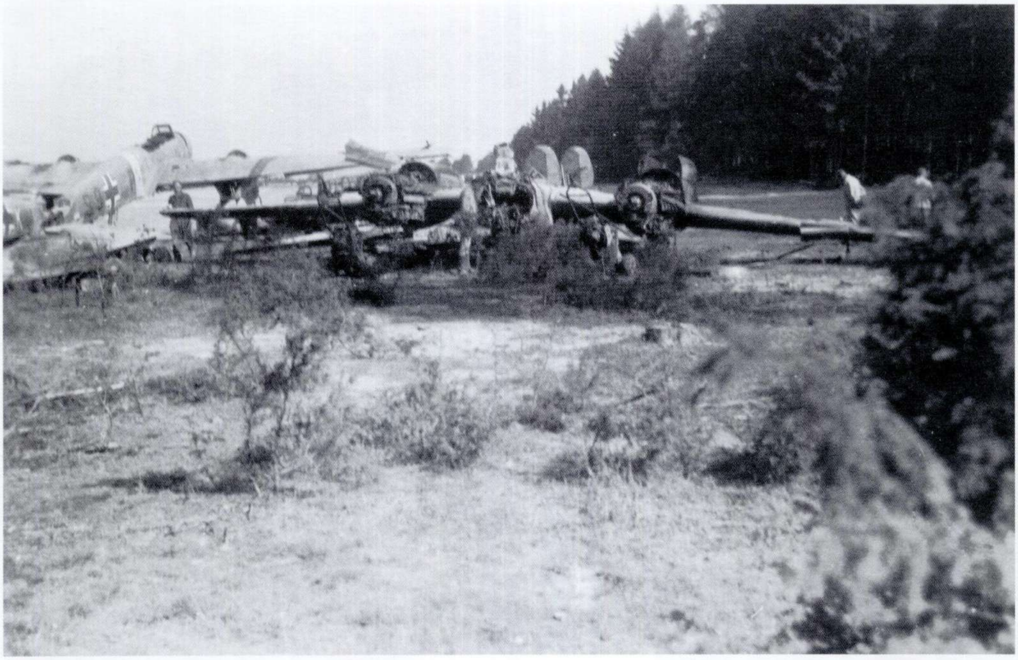




Three views showing mechanics changing starboard engines on Bf 110 of ZG 1.

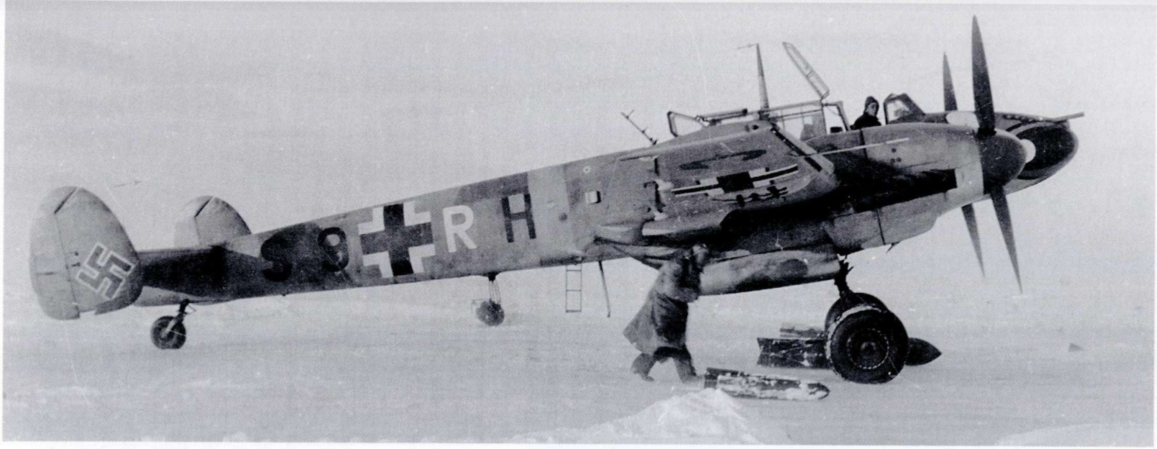




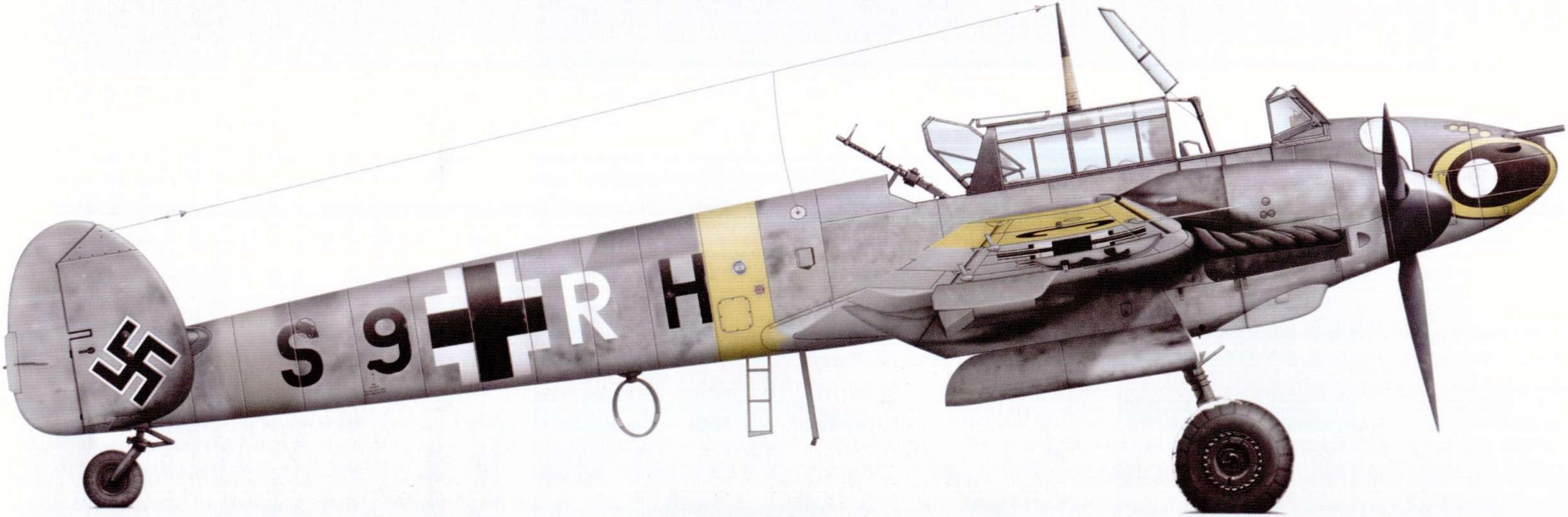


ABOVE: ZG 1 field maintenance section on the Russian front. Note the tents made up from the capes of several personnel of the unit.

LEFT: ZG 1 aircraft no longer fit for flying duties were cannibalised and used as a supply point for replacement parts. Here II./ZG 1 Bf 110s S9+CP and S9+KN can be seen. Note the light coloured rudders, possibly yellow, of the Bf 110 in the central distance.

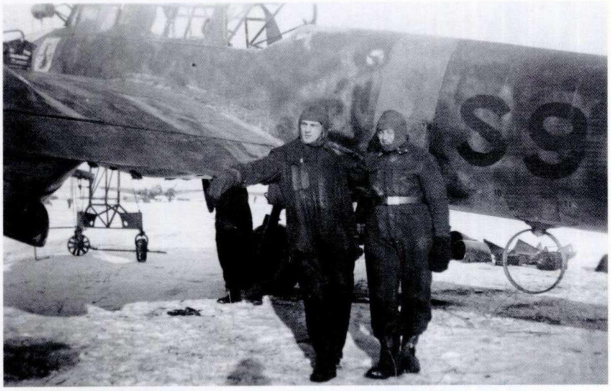


Bf 110 F-2, S9+RH, in mid-winter 1942/43. Bombs are in place beneath the fuselage and wings ready to be loaded for a mission. Note the wide placement of the characters in the fuselage code. The fuselage cross does not have any black outline to it, equally so the individual aircraft letter of 'R' in white. For an unknown reason, the letter under the wing, which in this case should b e 'R', is 'C'. Note the scissors link in the tailwheel, and a small piece of the starboard fin missing at its base. The yellow Russian front theatre band can be seen between the letter 'H' and the wing root.



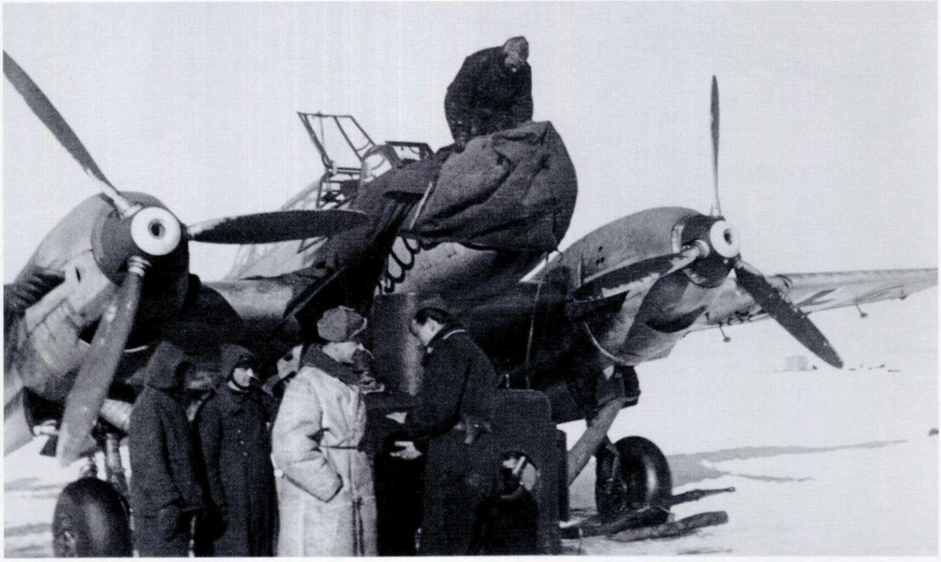
Messerschmitt Bf 110 F-2, S9+RH, of 1./ZG 1

S9+RH, a Bf 110 F-2 of 1./ZG 1, seen during the Russian winter of 1942/43. Features common to aircraft of I. Gruppe of ZG 1 are the theatre band around the forward fuselage, yellow undersurface wingtips and the lack of the central rear Bordfunker's panel. Note the straight demarcation line between the top surface camouflage colours and the fuselage side camouflage in the area of the 'R' and 'H' of the fuselage code.



LEFT: These mechanics of ZG 1 are well wrapped up to combat the severe conditions of a Russian winter at Tazinskaja in December 1942. Two emblems can be seen on the nose of this Bf 110, the SKG 210 shield emblem, and the large Wespe of ZG 1.

BELOW: Bf 110 E of ZG 1 being prepared for another mission. The machine in front of the aircraft is providing hot air to the engines by means of blowers placed in the undercarriage bays. An armoured windscreen is fitted, and the undersides of the wingtips are yellow. Note the individual aircraft letter, 'G', under the port wing.



1943

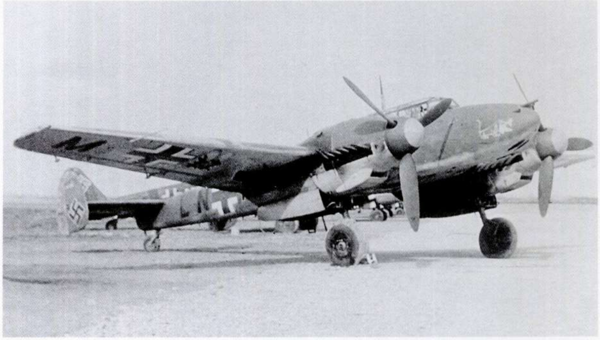
Russian Front

For *13.(Z)/JG 5* missions from Kemijärvi continued into the New Year, with January showing more than an average number of damaged *Bf 110*s recorded. One casualty was LN+RR, which crashed shortly after take-off. The crew of *Lt.* Walter Forst, pilot, and *Uffz.* Rupert Hitzinger, were killed. In early February the crew of *Uffz.* Otto Weißenberger, pilot, and *Bordfunker Uffz.* Wilhelm Pfeiffer was wounded when both engines of their *Bf 110 F-2*, LN+AR, failed and the pilot had to make an emergency crash landing. The *Zerstörerstaffel* had suffered several engine failures with this new variant, and, as mentioned earlier, the two *Gruppen* of *ZG 1* experienced similar problems when they were outfitted with the 'F'.

With improving weather once more, the *Staffel* returned to Kirkenes on 17 February. The last days of the month saw *Bf 110 F-2/Trop*, LN+BR, suffer an engine failure on return from a mission and pilot *Uffz.* Kurt Keilig managed a belly landing at Kirkenes, with recorded damage of 85 per cent to the aircraft. Keilig and his *Bordfunker* were both injured in the crash. On 28 February LN+SR took hits from Russian fighters and *Oblt.* Maertins made an emergency landing behind Russian lines. With Russian troops advancing to take the crew prisoner, Maertins shot himself to avoid capture. His *Bordfunker*, *Uffz.* Steinbeck, was taken prisoner.

By March the *Staffel* had begun to receive the new 'G' variant, and *Staffelkapitän, Oblt.* Karl Fritz Schlossstein was the first pilot to damage a 'G' when his machine overturned on landing on 14 March. Both he and his *Bordfunker, Fw.* Gerhard Friedrich, were wounded. Missions remained very much the same for the *Staffel*: attacks on Russian targets and escort to bombers in the northern sphere of the Russian Front, which was still proving to be exceptional in that it was a fairly static sector.

April resulted in more belly landings for the *Bf 110*s of the *Staffel*, but one event of note occurred on 11 April, when the unit code was first shown in records as '1B', and the correct *Staffel* letter of 'X' was recorded.



ABOVE: Bf 110 F-2 of 13.(Z)/JG 5 seen in the early months of 1943.

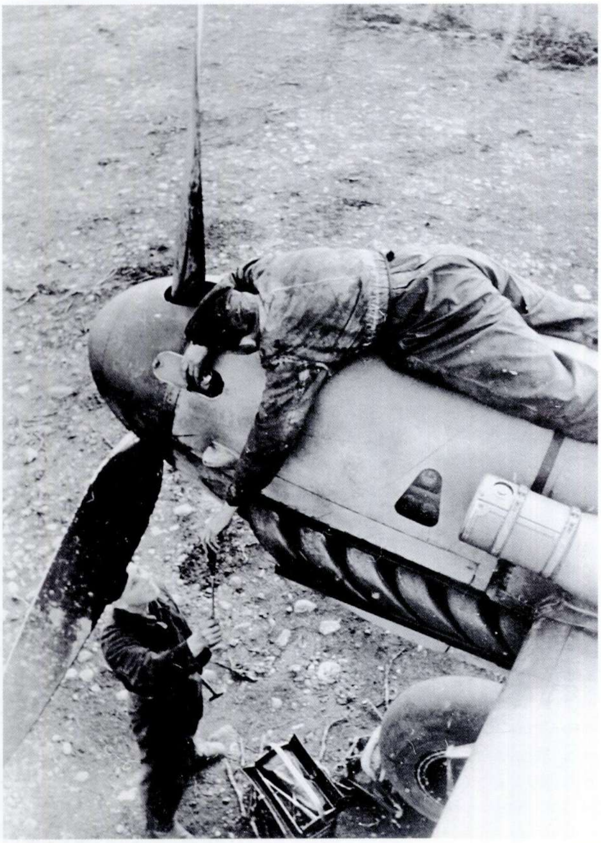
A feature of the northern front as 1943 wore on was that the Russian air presence grew in strength, and attacks against the German side of the lines became even more frequent. Allied to that, the quality of aircraft and pilots that the Germans faced showed a continuing improvement from when hostilities first opened. Escort missions continued, now coupled with scrambles as Russian missions over German-held territory became a regular feature, and the *Staffel* chalked up its 2,500th mission on 5 June. That event brought about a congratulatory visit to the *Staffel* from *Generaloberst* Stumpff.

Missions providing cover for shipping were also undertaken by the *Staffel* with increasing frequency. Emergency landings continued to show in the loss/damage returns, and the occasional tragedy happened, as with the crew of *Fw.* Heinrich Dreschler, pilot, and his *Bordfunker, Uffz.* Georg Möst, on 20 July, when a failed emergency landing resulted in the *Bf 110* exploding, killing both occupants.

One of the major duties undertaken by the *Staffel* was in September, when it provided escort for the heavy cruiser '*Lützow*' and four destroyers. This mission was the last undertaken by *Hptm.* Schlossstein. A few days later he was transferred to the General Staff in Oslo, his place at the head of the *Staffel* being taken temporarily by *Oblt.* Kirchmeier. Ultimately, Schlossstein would hand over the Staffel in November to *Hptm.* Herbert Treppe, whose background was in bombers having flown, for example, with *KG 26* during the Battle of Britain. Cover for shipping proved to be more and more the norm for the *Zerstörerstaffel* crews. One crew was killed in action on 6 September, and another crashed to their deaths on a training flight in October. Along with the odd crash-landing, these were remarkably light casualties for the *Staffel* for the latter months of the year. For the first time, the *Staffel* spent the Christmas and New Year period at Kirkenes. The main event of note in the Christmas period was the *Staffel* being put on alert for operations following the sinking of the '*Scharnhorst*', but adverse weather conditions precluded any missions being flown.

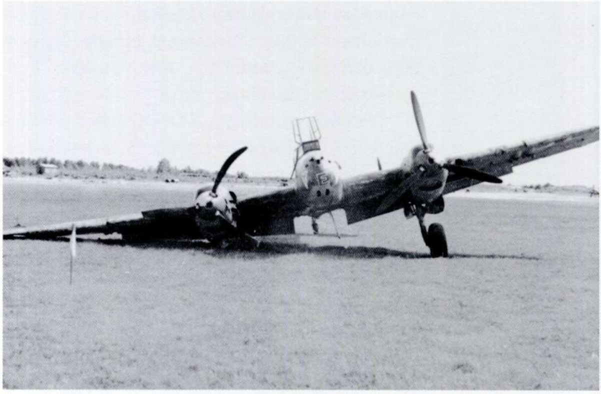
BELOW: Bf 110 E of ZG 1 at Dnjepropetrovsk in March 1943. The muddy ground during the day became frozen at night. Note that one spinner of the Bf 110 is capped, the other is not.

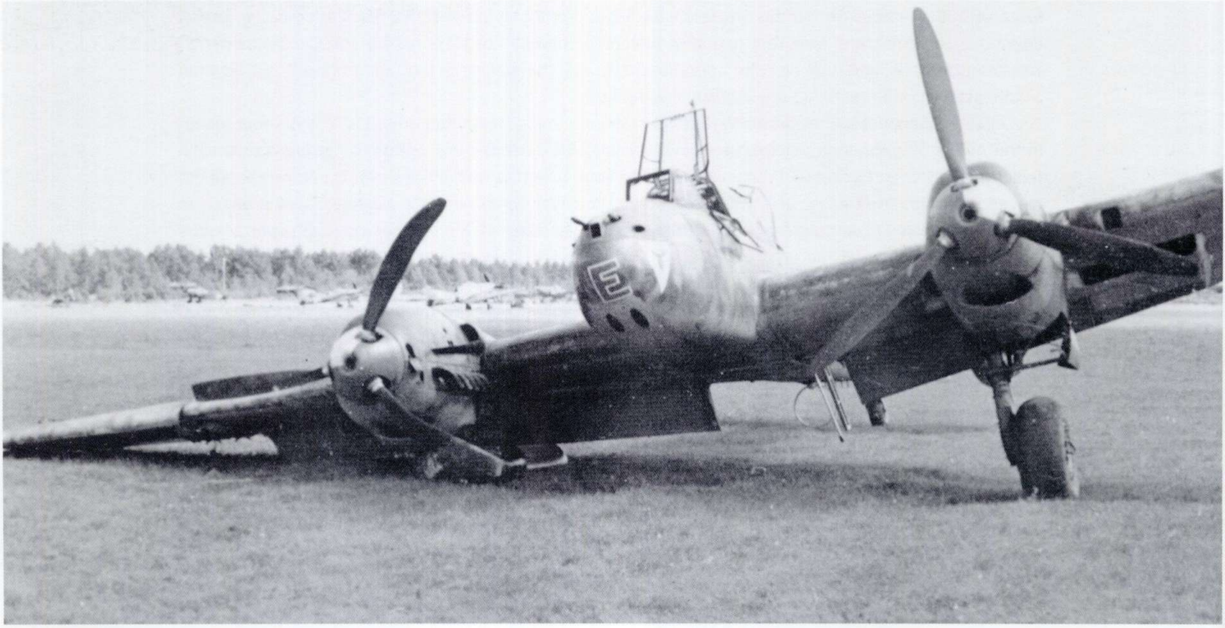
I./ZG 1 opened 1943 at Schachty, attacking targets in the Stalingrad area, but in the same month moved to Poltava, although other airfields in the vicinity were used, either as take-off grounds or landing bases in an emergency. *II./ZG 1* meanwhile, having been based at Soldatskaja over the New Year period, moved to Rostov in January, and would soon take up a somewhat nomadic existence, being based at Kuteinikowo and Dnjepropetrowsk in February and Nikolaijev in March. For both *Gruppen*, duties remained as before, with attacks on Russian troops, supply and communications lines, and airfields, with the usual crop of casualties as a result. *ZG 1* took delivery of its first *Bf 110 G*s in January, and on 21 January the first losses occurred when the *Bf 110 G-2*, S9+GB, flown by *Lt.* Peter Jenne overturned on landing at Schachty, suffering 50 per cent damage. Jenne's *Bordfunker, Fw.* Alfons Jehle, was killed in the crash. On the same day, *3. Staffel* lost a G-2 shot down by flak north of Kamensk. On 30 January *Ritterkreuz* holder *Oblt.* Eduard Tratt of *1. Staffel* received hits in his right engine and he and his *Bordfunker* baled out north of Rowenki, but



LEFT: Maintenance taking place on the port engine of a Bf 110 G-2. Note the small rectangular window on the engine cowling that allowed mechanics to check the reading on the three dials attached to the engine. Note also the fitment of a tropical filter.

BELOW AND BOTTOM: Two views of a Bf 110 E belonging to the Gruppenstab of I./SG 1 that has suffered a collapsed starboard undercarriage.





Bordfunker Fw. Paul Rennefahrt was killed. February resulted in one crew killed and one crew missing, both of *4. Staffel*, on 27 February. March continued in much the same vein with a loss on 18 March highlighting the dangerous nature of the low-level attacks carried out by the two *Gruppen*. The *3. Staffel Bf 110 E-2* of *Uffz.* Wilhelm Tögel, pilot, and *Uffz.* Werner Schulz, Bordfunker, hit the ground during a low level attack on a supply column west of the Kharkov-Belgorod road, killing both occupants. A *1. Staffel Bf 110 G-2* was lost on 25 March when it received a direct hit from flak at a height of 230 metres, and another G-2 was shot down by a Russian fighter, all four crew being killed. *II. Gruppe* was transferred from Russia to the African theatre in April, leaving *I. Gruppe* as the only full strength *Bf 110* strike unit on the Russian Front. The *Geschwaderstab* of *ZG 1* also remained in Russia.

I. Gruppe moved from Kharkov to Kramatorskaja some time in April, which proved to be a fortuitous month for it in terms of losses, no aircrew being killed in action. That was to change in early May when the *3. Staffel* crew of *Fw.* Werner Menard, pilot, and *Uffz.* Kurt Walter, received a direct hit from flak in *Bf 110 G-2*, S9+XL, Menard being killed and Walter seen to have baled out and was posted as missing. *3. Staffel* lost a long serving officer on 16 May when *Oblt.* Hans-Erich Hesse and his *Bordfunker Uffz.* Paul Kastner were shot down, again by flak, during an attack on Schtschigry airfield.

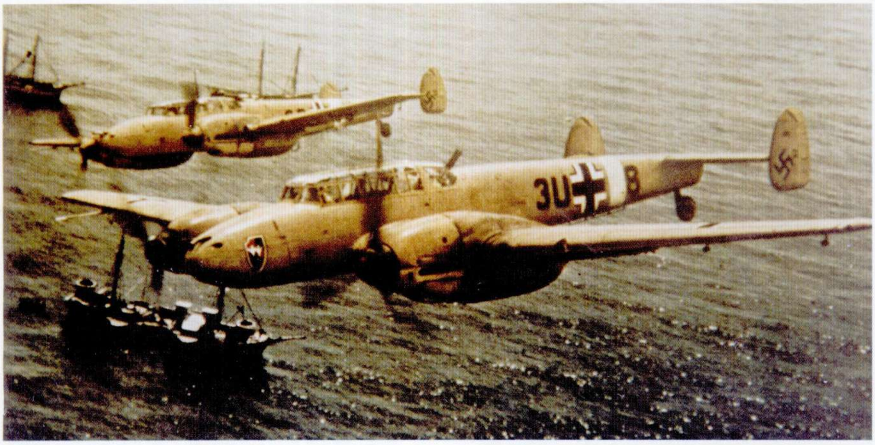
In June, *Panzerjagdstaffel/ZG 1* was formed, the title of the *Staffel* alluding to its role of being charged specifically with the task of tank-busting. This *Staffel*, based at Seschtschinskaja and later Ledna-Ost and Brjansk, was to have a brief life, being disbanded two months later. *I. Gruppe* meanwhile had moved to Ledna-Ost to continue operations, and was involved in providing air support to German ground forces involved in the battle of Kursk in June. Missions continued into July, with disastrous consequences for the unit in the middle of the month.

On 13 July, the *Bf 110 G-2*, S9+BA, of *Geschwaderkommodore, Obstlt.* Joachim Blechschmidt, and his *Bordfunker, Uffz.* Hans Wörl, force landed behind Russian lines following combat with Russian fighters. Nothing further was ever seen or heard of them. The day after, *Hptm.* Wilfried Hermann, *Gruppenkommandeur* of *I. Gruppe* was shot down by flak in *Bf 110 G-2*, S9+FB, together with his *Bordfunker, Ofw.* Albert Weinhold, both being killed. A further loss to *I. Gruppe* occurred on 19 July when *Hptm.* Max Franzisket and his *Bordfunker* were posted missing after being hit by flak. At the end of the month *I. Gruppe* was withdrawn from the Russian Front and returned to Germany, thus ending the last major presence of *Bf 110*s on that front.

BELOW: A derelict Bf 110 of II./ZG 1 in winter camouflage can be seen on an unknown airfield that has been retaken by the Russians.

Africa – The Final Phase

The Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria in November 1942 did not bode well for the German forces in the African theatre, not only for the possibility of a pincer movement against them but also for the fact that American forces would be entering the fray, and over time, those American forces would inevitably be strengthened. For *III./ZG 26*, with modern Allied fighters ranging against them in increasing numbers, the future appeared bleak for its *Zerstörer Staffeln*. Convoy cover and transport escort duties continued, and in combat in the first weeks of the year, *Bf 110*s fared as well as their opponents. On occasions the German pilots had the opportunity to attack American bombers seeking out German convoys. In these situations, however, the danger of top cover fighters was always there, as proved to be the case on 3 February when four *Bf 110*s positioned to attack a formation of B-26 Marauders, only to be bounced by the P-38 escort. Of the four, only *Fw.* Wegmann managed to return to base, and that with a badly damaged aircraft. Into March, missions continued apace, with the occasional success such as claims for five torpedo-bombers on 17 March. In April, the inevitable pressure of increased enemy numbers began to tell when, on 5 April, a formation of *Ju 52/3m*s attempting to take vital supplies to the *Afrika Korps* was sighted and intercepted by P-38s. The 18 *Luftwaffe* fighters (including six *Bf 110*s) providing cover were soon overwhelmed when a further force of 26 P-38s entered the fray. The loss of two *Bf110*s was added to the critical loss of at least 14 *Ju52/3m*s with their valuable cargoes. April was turning into a disastrous month for the *Luftwaffe* transport force and its escorts, and the 18th saw a *Ju 52/3m* force attacked by both British and American fighters, with a resulting loss of 24 *Junker*s, and a further ten escorts shot down. It was

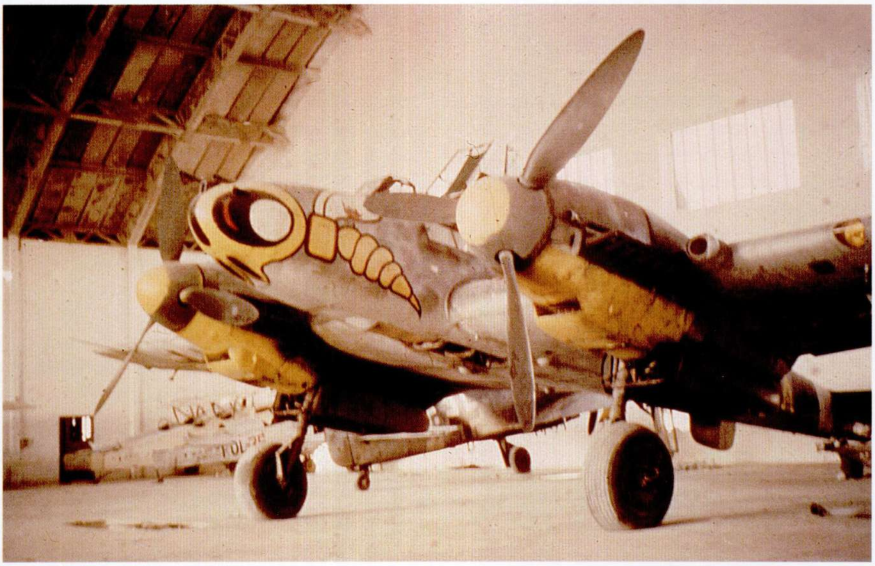


LEFT: Two Bf 110 Es of III./ZG 26 in sand overall upper surface camouflage fly low over shipping in the African theatre.

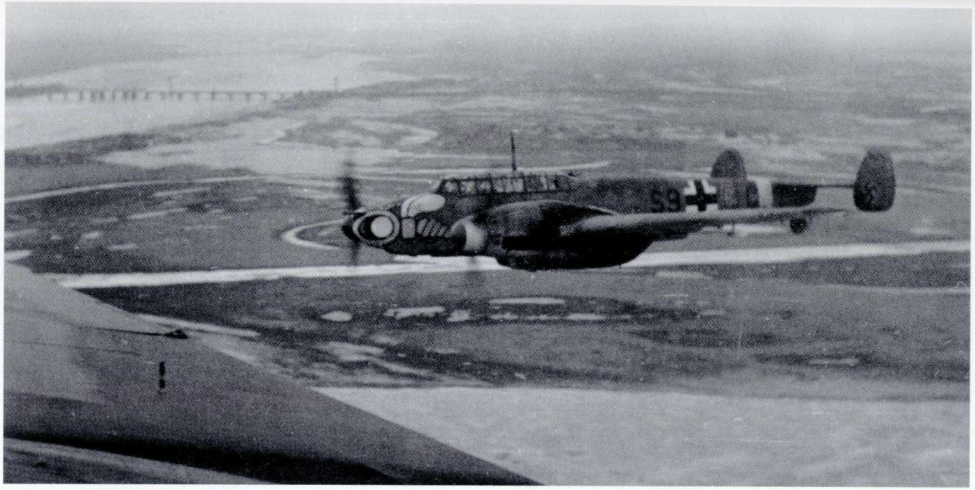
becoming clear that the air war was being lost by the *Luftwaffe* in this theatre, and the *Bf 110*s of *III./ZG 26* were paying a proportionate price.

In April, *II./ZG 1* was pulled back from the Russian Front and staged across Europe to initially take up residence at Trapani in Italy. The *Gruppe*'s stay in the Mediterranean theatre would be relatively brief. Changing bases on a monthly basis (Pomigliano in May, Montecorvino in June and Pisa in July), it would be transferred to France in August. Flying *Bf 110 G-2*s, the *Gruppe* was quickly pitched into action, and soon began to suffer losses. The occasional loss in April was compounded on 1 May by the loss of four *Bf 110*s to British fighters, all eight crewmen posted as missing.

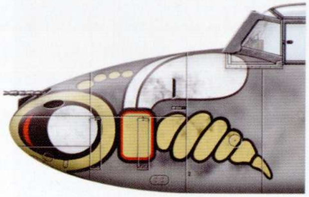
In May 1943 German forces withdrew from Tunisia, and all of the Mediterranean-based *Zerstörer* units now took up residence in Italy. The remaining time of both *III./ZG 26* and *II./ZG 1* in this theatre of war would be brief. With the Allied invasion of Sicily on 10 July, *III./ZG 26* would spend an intense two weeks flying ground-attack and fighter-bomber missions before being recalled to Plantlünne in Germany. *II./ZG 1* was similarly heavily engaged during this time, but by now to little effect. Losses included a collision between two *Bf 110*s during combat with Spitfires, only one of the four crewmen involved surviving. The final loss for *II./ZG 1* occurred on 28 July north-east of Catania when a *Bf 110 G-2/Trop* was shot down in combat with fighters during a shipping attack. By early August *II./ZG 1* had been withdrawn to Istris and Lorient. Its time under *Fliegerführer Atlantik* would be brief; in November 1943 it was transferred to Wels in Austria until its ultimate disbandment in July 1944.

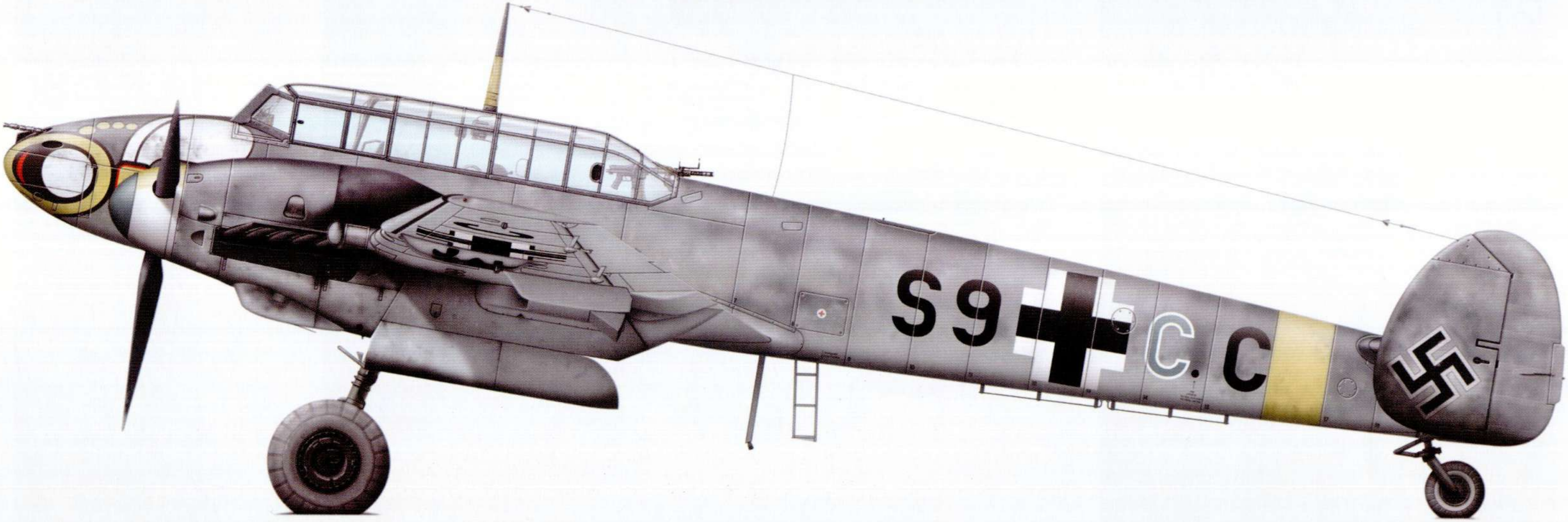


LEFT: Bf 110 G-2 of II./ZG 1 seen in Italy in 1943. Note the yellow tips to the spinners and the yellow lower engine cowlings. An armoured windscreen is fitted.



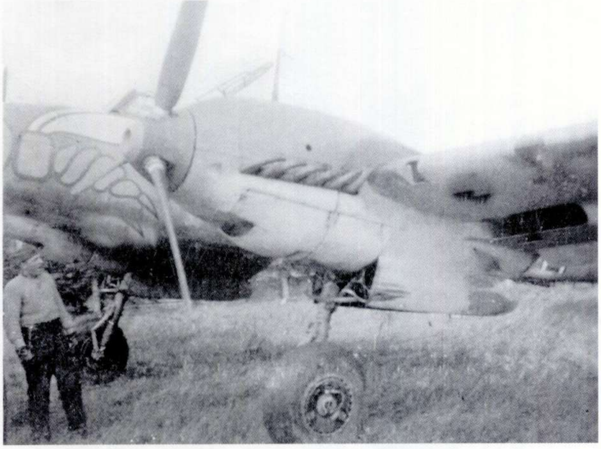
Excellent in-flight view of Bf 110 G-2, S9+CC, of the Gruppenstab of II./ZG 1 in the Russian front. The individual aircraft letter 'C' is in the Gruppenstab colour of green. A yellow theatre band is on the rear fuselage, and the revised sideways rear-opening canopy for the Bordfunker is fitted, as is the new MG 81 Z rear armament.

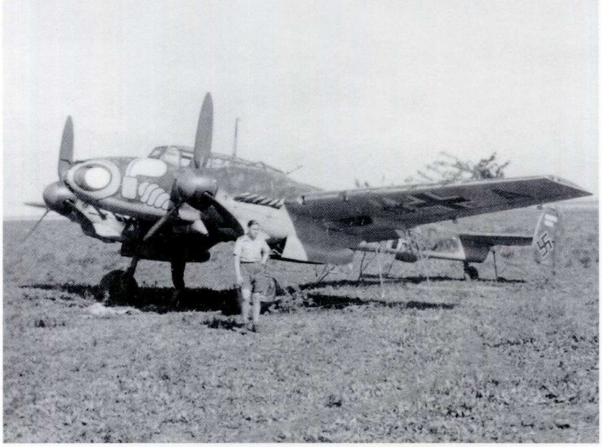




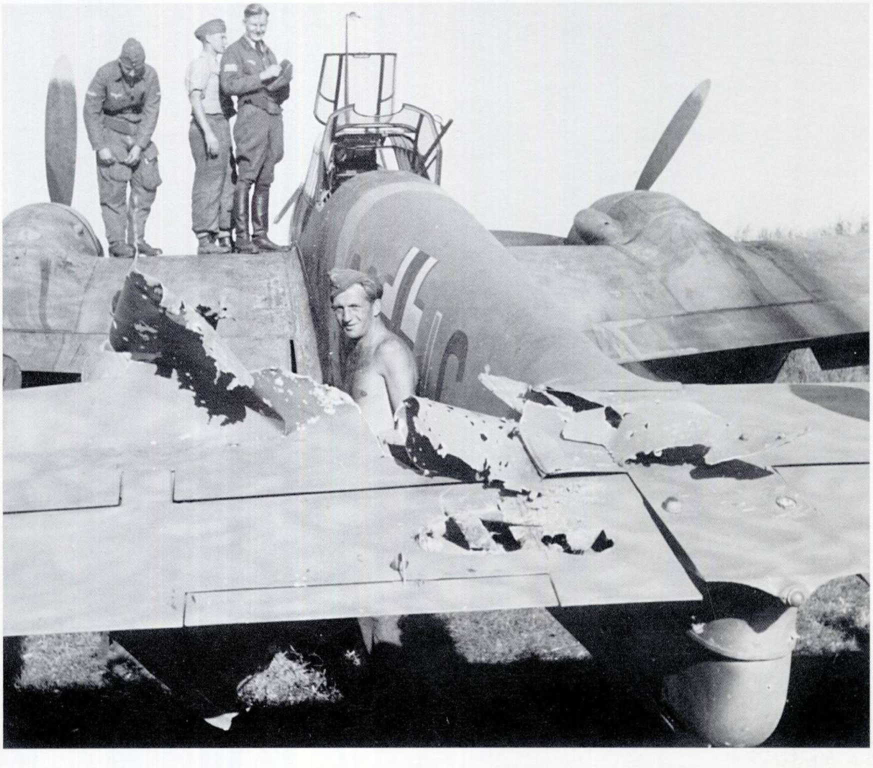
Messerschmitt Bf 110 G-2 of the Gruppenstab of II./ZG 1

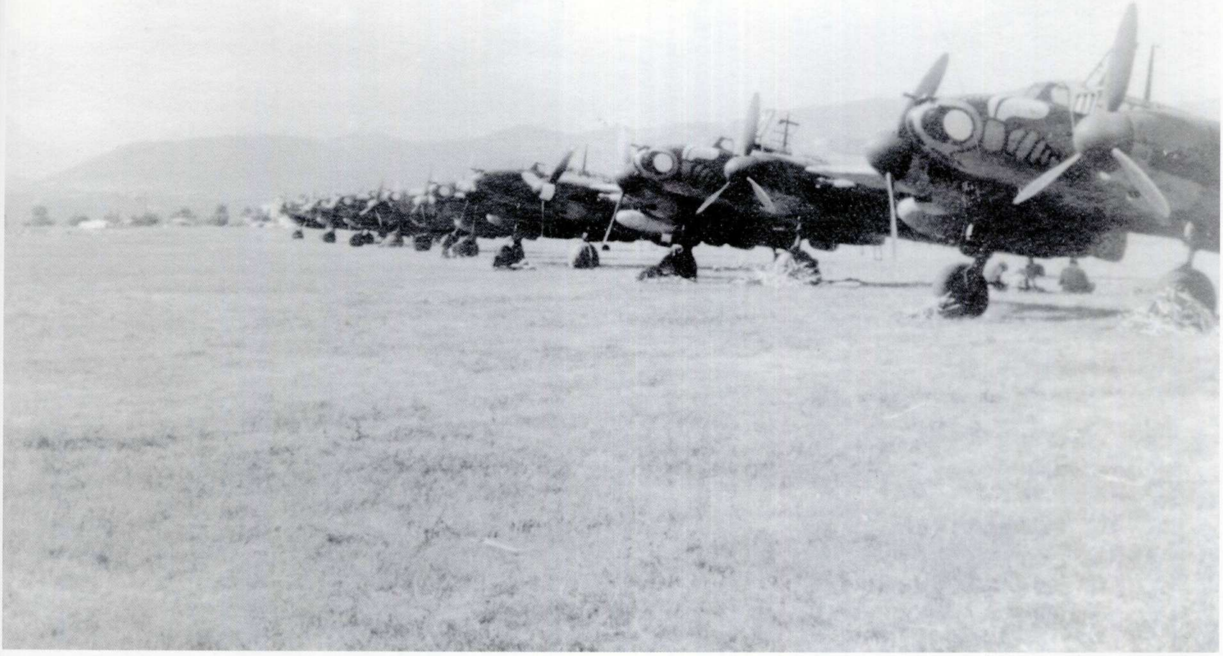
S9+CC, a Bf 110 G-2 of the Gruppenstab of II./ZG 1. A yellow theatre band can be seen on the rear fuselage, and the spinners are white and yellow, tipped in the Gruppenstab colour of green. The upper surface camouflage is the mid-war years colours of RLM 75 and 76.

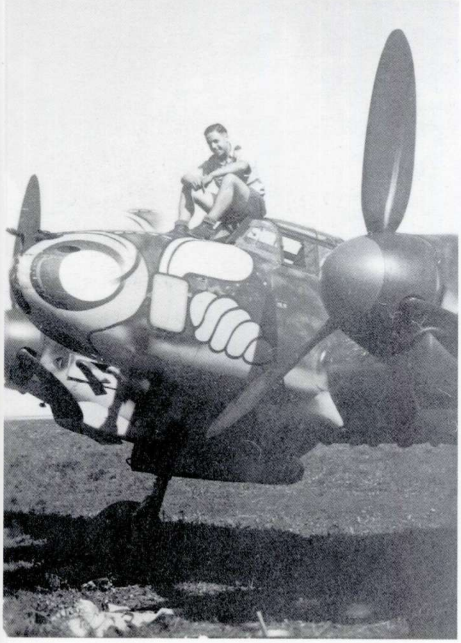




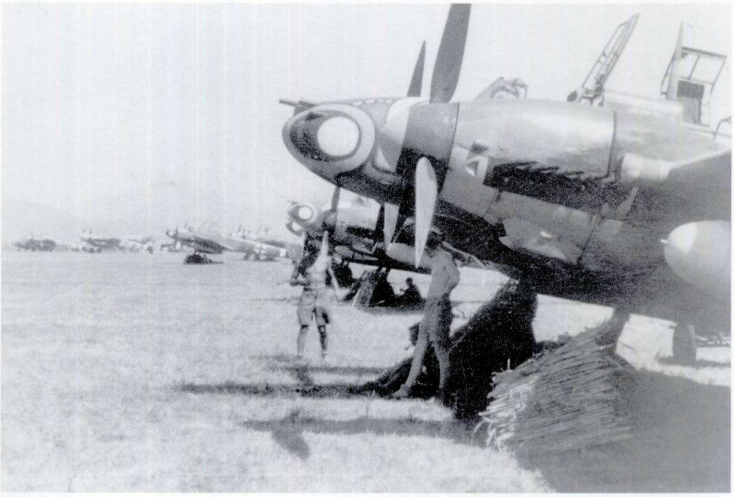
THIS PAGE: Views of II./ZG I Bf 110s at the time the Gruppe was based at Nikoleijev in March 1943. S9+IC returned to base on 16 March 1943 with flak damage to its rear flying surfaces.

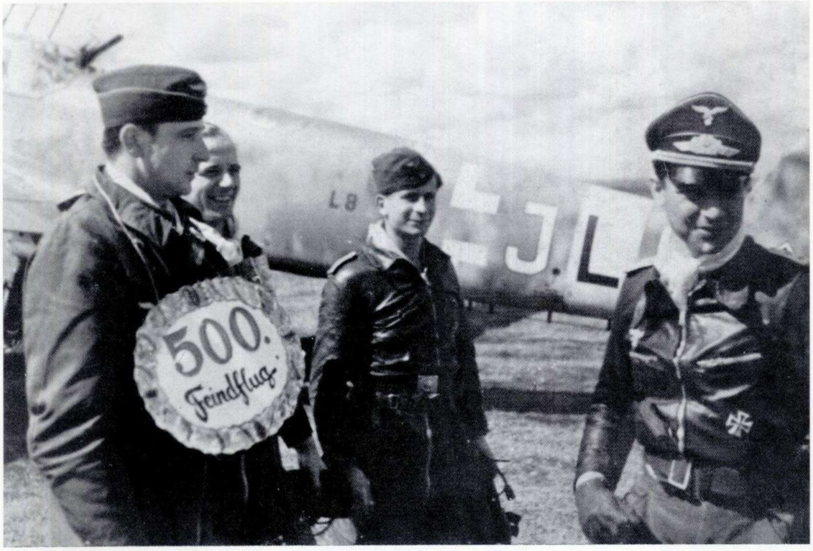




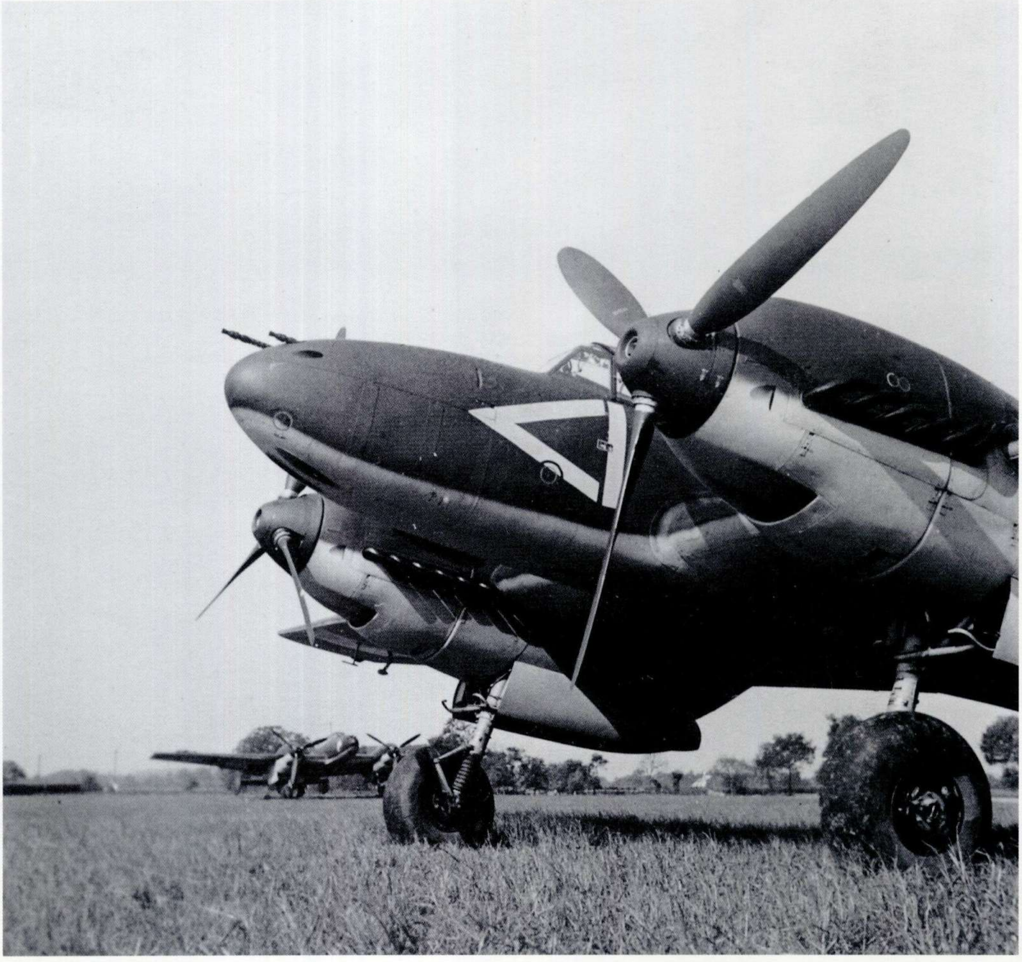


THIS PAGE: Series of views of Bf 110 G-2s of II./ZG 1 in Italy. S9+AC carries several victory bars on its port fin. On one photo the mainwheel tyres have been covered to protect them from the intense heat.

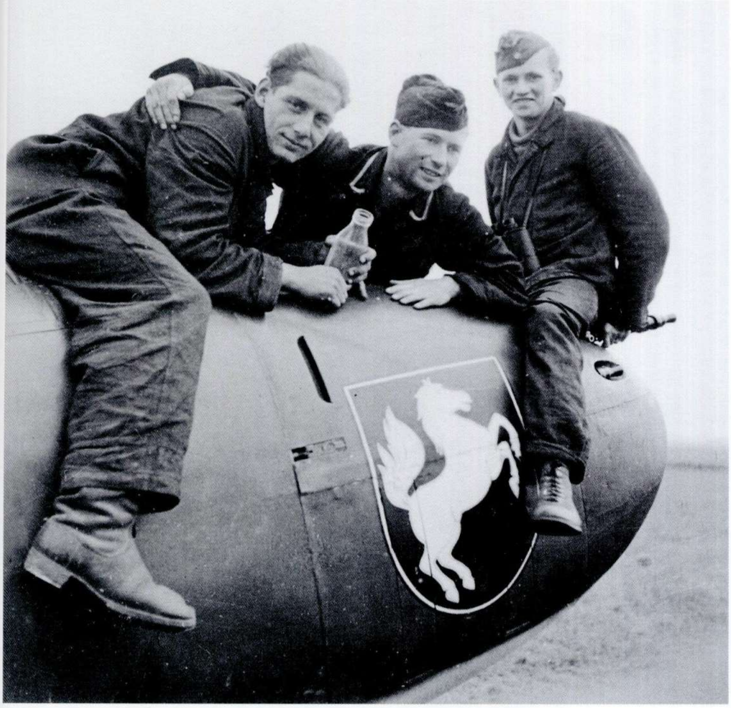




LEFT: Bf 110 G-3, L8+JL of 3./NAGr. 4 is the backdrop for the commemoration of the Staffel's achievement of completing 500 missions. Note the fuselage cross is white only, and the individual aircraft letter 'J' is yellow outlined in black. The unit code of 'L8' is in the smaller style that was introduced sometime during 1943.



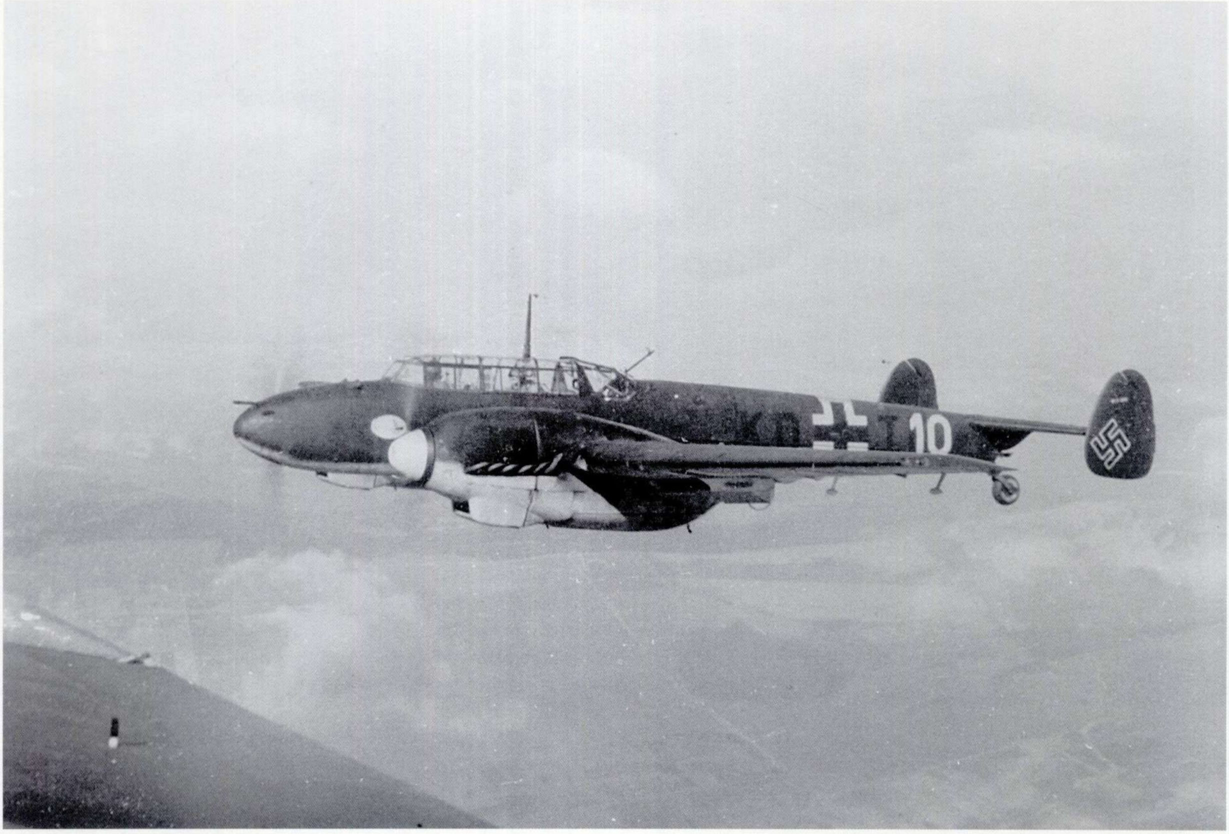
RIGHT:
This Bf 110 C-5 of NAGr. 11 carries the early war style solid camouflage on its upper surfaces, with a large chevron and bar.



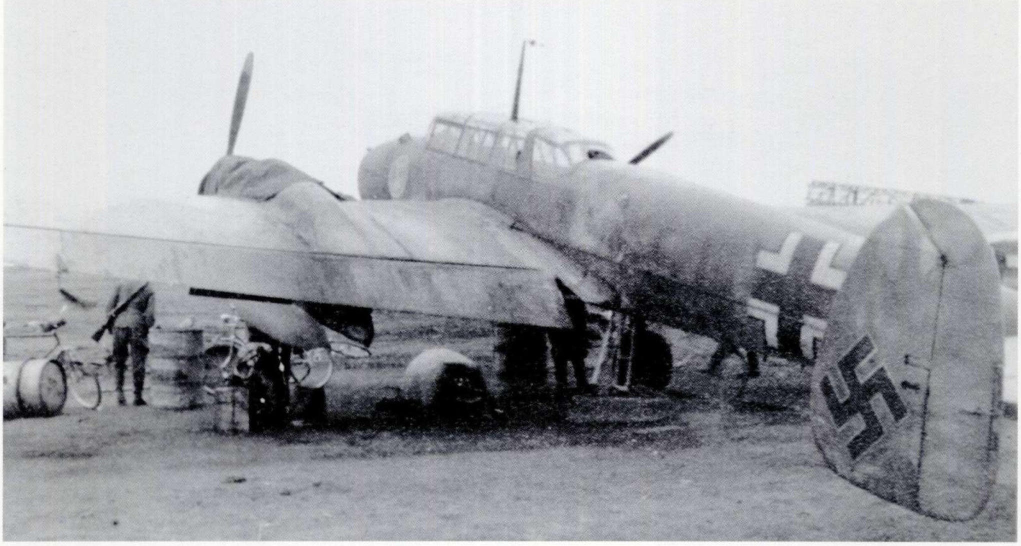
LEFT: Groundcrew pose on the nose of a Bf 110 C-5 of NAGr. 11 with the rampant horse emblem in evidence.

BELOW: NAGr. 11's 'hack' Bf 108, with the rampant horse emblem seen again.

BELOW: A Bf 110 C-5 with solid upper surface camouflage and a single chevron on the nose can be seen in the background as mechanics work with stores in the foreground.



BELOW: Bf 110 C-2, KD+TB, W. Nr. 2132, that has previously been deployed to towing duties. Seen here with NJG Schule 1, it carries the number '10' on the rear fuselage and an unidentified emblem on the nose. The towing features, of rear view mirrors ahead of the pilots' windscreen, enlarged radiators (required due to the low speed involving in towing huge transport aircraft) and shortened rear fuselage housing the pulley system. This Bf 110 retained its early-war style solid upper surface camouflage.



LEFT: Another Bf 110 employed on towing duties. This view shows to excellent effect the placement of the rear view mirror on the forward fuselage, and the pulley running along the lower fuselage together with the attachment point at the wing root.

Notable Recipients of the *Ritterkreuz* (Knights Cross of the Iron Cross)

Whereas the *Luftwaffe's* single-engined fighter pilots gained the lion's share of awards and decorations in the Second World War, the *Zerstörer* pilots' efforts and achievements did not go unnoticed. The following list gives a snapshot of several *Zerstörer* pilots who were decorated with the *Ritterkreuz*, or the further awards connected with it.

Walter Rubensdörffer

Walter Rubensdörffer had served with the Condor Legion and in General Staff posts before being posted as Commanding Officer of the newly-formed fighter-bomber unit *Erprobungsgruppe 210*. Officially coming into existence on 1 July 1940, equipped with two *Staffeln* of Bf 110s and one of Bf 109s, the unit commenced operations on 13 July 1940. Rubensdörffer flew on most of the famous raids carried out by the unit up to his death in action on the raid on Croydon airfield in the early evening of 15 August 1940. On 19 August 1940 he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* posthumously. He was only the fifth fighter pilot to receive the award, and the first *Zerstörer* pilot to be so honoured.

Martin Lutz

Martin Lutz was another Condor Legion veteran who later served with *1./ZG 1*, becoming *Staffelkapitän* when *Major* Hammes was killed in action on 6 September 1939. He led *1. Staffel* throughout the rest of the Polish campaign and the western campaign in the spring of 1940. When *1./ZG 1* became *1./Erpr. Gr. 210* he moved with his *Staffel* to the new unit. He led *1./Erpr. Gr. 210* on numerous fighter-bomber missions throughout the summer of 1940 and with the loss of the second *Gruppenkommandeur* of the unit, he was appointed to the post. He was shot down and killed on 27 September 1940 on a raid against an aircraft works in the Bristol area, receiving the *Ritterkreuz* posthumously on 1 October 1940.

Walter Grabmann

Walter Grabmann's front line service began in the Spanish Civil War as Commanding Officer of *JGr. 88*, and in that conflict he claimed seven victories. He *led I.(Schw. Jagd)/LG 1* in the Polish campaign, and was later posted as *Geschwaderkommodore* of *ZG 76* on 1 May 1940. Shot down and taken prisoner during the western campaign, he returned to his unit and led it throughout the Battle of Britain, during which he claimed his final victories, taking his tally to 13. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 14 September 1940. From June 1941 Grabmann served in a succession of Staff posts, as well as having command of *Zerstörerschule Memmingen*, which later became *ZG 101*. Walter Grabmann survived the war having reached the rank of *Generalmajor*, and having flown over 250 missions.

Erich Groth

Erich Groth led the Bf 109-equipped *2./ZG 2* during the Polish campaign before being appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of the famous *'Haifischgruppe'*, *II./ZG 76*, on 1 January 1940. He led the *Gruppe* during the western campaign and the Battle of Britain during 1940. On 1 October 1940 he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz*. Towards the end of 1940 the *Gruppe* was withdrawn from the Channel front, and Groth remained in command of *II./ZG 76* during their time in the far north of Europe in 1941. He was killed on a non-combat flight on 12 August 1941 when his Bf 110 E-1, M8+TC, crashed in bad weather. He had claimed 13 victories in the campaigns of 1940.

Hans-Joachim Jabs

Hans-Joachim Jabs military career began in 1936, and originally he was posted to a bomber unit. Later moving to fighters, he was posted to *I.(Schw)/JG 144*, which later became *II./ZG 76*. With this unit he flew from the outset of the war and by the end of the Battle of Britain had claimed 19 victories. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on the same day as his *Gruppenkommandeur* Erich Groth: 1 October 1940. In the same month he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *6./ZG 76*. He led the *Staffel* throughout 1941 until it was incorporated in the night fighter arm. He began a steady rise to prominence on night fighters, and was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *IV./NJG 1* in August 1943. He rose to *Geschwaderkommodore* of *NJG 1* in March 1944 and in the same month he was awarded the *Eichenlaube* to his *Ritterkreuz*. Jabs ended the war with a further 31 victories (28 at night, with three day victories when night fighters were thrown into the desperate day time defence of the Reich in the closing months of the war) to add to his 19 day successes.

Joachim-Friedrich Huth

Joachim-Friedrich Huth served in both the First and Second World Wars, flying with *Jagdstaffel 14* and claiming one victory before being badly wounded in combat on 23 February 1918 resulting in his right leg being amputated. Joining the *Luftwaffe* in 1933, he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *5./JG 132* in April 1936 and through a number of re-designations led *I./ZG 1* upon the outbreak of war in September 1939. On 1 January 1940 he was posted to ZG 26 as *Geschwaderkommodore*. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 11 September 1940. From November 1940, at the age of 44, he was posted to various staff positions, and ended the war with the rank of *Generalleutnant*.

Hans Schalk

Hans Schalk began his military career in the Austrian army in 1922 and transferred to the flying service in 1928. Following the merging of the Austrian and German military forces, Schalk led *IV./JG 134*, which would later be re-designated *III./ZG 26*. In the campaigns of 1940 he claimed a total of 11 victories and was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 11 September 1940. On 1 October

1940 he became *Geschwaderkommodore* of *ZG 26*. With the transfer of two *Gruppen* of *ZG 26* into the night fighter arm in the second half of 1941, he took up a post as *Geschwaderkommodore* of *NJG 3*. After a short spell as *Geschwaderkommodore* of *NJG 4* Schalk was posted to various staff positions. He ended the war with the rank of *Oberst*.

Friedrich Vollbracht

Friedrich Vollbracht, born in 1887, saw service in the First World War, initially in the infantry, and later in the *Luftwaffe*. Flying with *Jagdstaffel 5*, he claimed two victories before the end of that conflict. He re-entered the *Luftwaffe* in 1934 and was *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 26* at the outbreak of the Second World War. At the beginning of April 1940 at the age of 53, he was appointed *Geschwaderkommodore* of *ZG 2*. Adding two further victories in the western campaign to his First World War tally, he was one of the elite band of pilots who claimed combat victories in both wars. On 28 September 1940 he took over command of *Zerstörer-Ergänzungsgruppe Vaerlöse*, and was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 13 October 1940. From there he served in a number of staff appointments, surviving the war with the rank of *Oberst* and living to the age of 81.

Heinz Nacke

Another veteran of the Condor Legion, by July 1939 Heinz Nacke was *Staffelkapitän* of *6./ZG 76*. He led the *Staffel* during the Polish and western campaigns, and during the Battle of Britain up to his being wounded in combat on 30 August 1940, his Bf 110 C-4, M8+KM, being totally written off in a crash-landing at St. Ingelvert. He had scored 12 victories, and was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 2 November 1940. In April 1941 he was leader of the *Erprobungsstaffel 210*, and four months later he transferred to *II./ZG 76* as its *Gruppenkommandeur*, later transferring to night fighters with his *Gruppe*. In April 1943 he took over *Erprobungskommando 25*, a unit tasked with testing the viability of new weapons for front line use, and in the following month he was posted to *II./ZG 1* as *Gruppenkommandeur*. In August 1943 he was badly wounded in a flying accident, and took no further part in flying combat missions. He finished the war as *Major*.

Ralph von Rettberg

Ralph von Rettberg was among those flyers who received secret training in Lipetsk in the Soviet Union before the official declaration of the existence of the Luftwaffe. By the outbreak of the war he was *Staffelkapitän* of *1./ZG 26*, and on 1 April 1940 he took over command of *II./ZG 26*. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 14 June 1941 following the completion of 100 missions. He gave up his post in *II./ZG 26* to take command of *ZG 2* in May 1942. In January 1943 he was in the African theatre with *ZG 'Sud'*, and from November 1943 he moved into staff positions. He ended the war as *Oberst*.

Theodor Weißenberger

Theodor Weißenberger was posted to *1.(Z)/JG 77* on 1 September 1941. Flying Bf 110s, he claimed 23 victories and a recorded a host of claims against ground targets, including locomotives and artillery posts. He moved to *6./JG 5* in September 1942, receiving the *Ritterkreuz* soon afterwards, on 13 November 1942. His run of success continued, and in June 1943 he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *7./JG 5*, having 91 victories to his account by that time. Transferring to *6./JG 5* in September 1943 to lead that *Staffel*, he continued to score steadily, and in April 1944 he was appointed to lead *II./JG 5*, when his victory score stood at over 150. Two months later he took over *I./JG 5*, and reached his 200th victory on 25 July. On 1 December 1944 he was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *I./JG 7*, and in the following month rose to the position of *Geschwaderkommodore* of *JG 7*. Flying the Me 262 he scored a further eight victories and finished the war with the rank of *Major*.

Wilhelm Spies

William Spies joined the *Luftwaffe* in 1935 and served in the Condor Legion in the Spanish Civil War. He scored his first victories in the Polish campaign, and moved to *I./ZG 26* in early 1940. He flew in the western campaign and the Battle of Britain, becoming *Staffelkapitän* of *1./ZG 26* on 12 August. He survived being shot down into the Channel on 11 September in Bf 110 C-4, U8+KH, and by the end of 1940 he had recorded nine victories. He led *1. Staffel* in the Balkans campaign and the opening days on the Russian front. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 14 June 1941, and on 19 July was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *I./ZG 26*. On 27 January 1942 he was shot down and killed during a low level attack on Russian positions south-west of Suchinitschi. Wilhelm Spies had claimed 20 victories in over 300 missions. He was posthumously promoted to *Major*, and awarded the *Eichenlaube* to the *Ritterkreuz* on 5 April 1942.

Rolf Kaldrack

Rolf Kaldrack joined the Luftwaffe in 1935 and flew as an observer in a reconnaissance unit with the Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War. By the outbreak of war he was flying with *6./ZG 1*. On 18 December, in the famous 'Battle of Heligoland Bight' he claimed one Wellington. Shortly afterwards he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *4./ZG 1*, and took part in the western campaign. Another notable victory was recorded on 8 June 1940 when he made a claim for a Bf 109 of the Swiss Air Force. *4./ZG 1* was re-designated *7./ZG 76* on 1 July, and he led this *Staffel* in the early stages of the Battle of Britain until his *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm*. Friedrich-Karl Dickoré was shot down into the Channel on 15 August. Rolf Kaldrack was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *III./ZG 76* on the following day. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 2 November 1940 after recording 11 victories. He continued to lead his *Gruppe* when it was re-designated *II./SKG 210* in April 1941 and carried out operations on the Russian Front. In January 1942 *II./SKG 210* was re-designated *II./ZG 1*, and on 3 February 1942 during a mission the Bf 110 of *Oblt*. Ortmann crashed into the Bf 110 E-1, S9+IC, of *Hptm*. Rolf Kaldrack, all four crewmen being killed in the ensuing crash. He was posthumously awarded *Eichenlaub* to the *Ritterkreuz* on 9 February.

Georg Christl

Georg Christl flew with *7./ZG 26* in 1940, becoming *Staffelkapitän* of that *Staffel* in April 1941. He was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *III./ZG 26* in December 1941. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 18 March 1942 for three victories and being particularly successful in the ground attack missions that he had undertaken. In July 1943 he was posted to a Staff appointment with the General of Fighter Pilots, and in June 1944 he led the experimental unit, JG 10, up to the end of the war. He finished the war with the rank of *Major*.

Eduard Tratt

Eduard Tratt joined the *Luftwaffe* in 1937 and by the outbreak of war he was flying with *1./ZG 1*. He flew in the western campaign, recording his first victories on 1 June 1940. He moved with his *Staffel* to *1./Erpr. Gr. 210* when *1./ZG 1* was re-designated on 1 July 1940. He flew with *1./Erpr. Gr. 210* throughout its existence, and then with *1./SKG 210* on the Russian Front in 1941. In January 1942 he moved to *4./ZG 26*, and in March 1942 was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of *6./ZG 26*. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 12 April 1942 after recording his 20th victory. He led *2./ZG 2* from May 1942 briefly, and then returned to *ZG 1* to lead *1. Staffel*. Wounded in combat on 30 January 1943, he was posted to *Erprobungskommando 25* in May 1943 upon his recovery. In October 1943 he was posted to *II./ZG 26* as *Gruppenkommandeur*, taking up front line duties once again, this time in the Me 410. By 22 February 1944 his victory score had risen to 38, when he was shot down and killed near Nordhausen in a Me 410A. He was posthumously promoted to *Major*, and awarded *Eichenlaube* to the *Ritterkreuz* on 26 March 1944.

Ulrich Diesing

Ulrich Diesing was also a veteran of the Condor Legion, in a bomber unit. He then served in the General Staff before being posted to *I./SKG 210* on 15 September 1941 as *Gruppenkommandeur*. He was appointed *Geschwaderkommodore* of the unit on 3 March 1942 (by then re-designated *ZG 1*). He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 6 September 1942, and in the following month he again returned to General Staff duties. Only days before the end of the war, on 17 April 1945, he was killed in a car crash. His last rank was *Generalmajor*.

Helmut Haugk

Helmut Haugk was flying with *7./ZG 26* at the outbreak of war, and in December 1939 and early 1940 ditched into the sea twice. He flew throughout the western campaign and the Battle of Britain, and moved to the African theatre with his *Staffel* in December 1940. He moved to *9./ZG 26* in April 1942. He was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* in December 1942 for 12 victories and his success in destroying enemy ground targets. Promoted to *Leutnant* in January 1943, he was recalled to Germany in June to *1./ZG 101*. In October 1943 he was posted to *4./ZG 76* on Reich defence duties and eventually became its *Staffelkapitän*. He was shot down twice in combat, on 28 January 1944 and 16 March, baling out both times. Recovering from his wounds, he was posted to *II./ZG 101*, becoming *Gruppenkommandeur* of that unit in July 1944. The following month he moved to *Jagdgeschwader 102*, and ultimately ended the war as *Geschwaderkommodore* of that unit, having flown nearly 450 missions during the war.

Helmut Viedebannt

Helmut Viedebannt was flying with *5./ZG 1* at the outbreak of war. He flew with this *Staffel* in the Polish campaign, the western campaign and the Battle of Britain. He remained with the *Staffel* when the Russian campaign opened and eventually, when the *Staffel* had been through a further re-designation back to *5./ZG 1*, he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* in October 1942. The award of the *Ritterkreuz* followed in December 1942. He was then appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./SKG 10* in February 1943 in southern Italy before returning to the Channel coast with *I./SKG 10* in August 1943. From early 1944 he worked at the experimental stations of Gotenhafen and Peenemunde. He was killed on 1 May 1945.

Joachim Blechschmidt

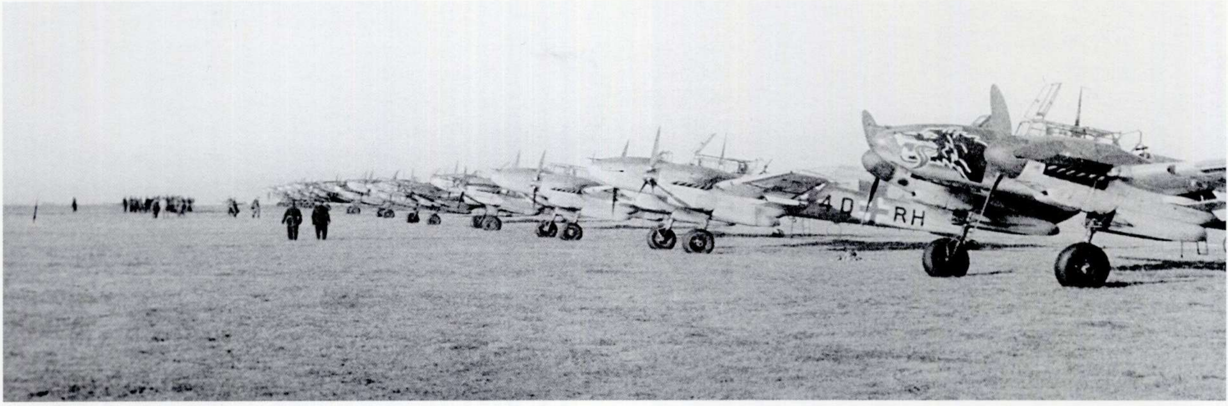
Joachim Blechschmidt's early missions were not undertaken as a fighter pilot. In February 1942 he was serving as a pilot in a transport unit. He was posted in to *I./ZG 1* as *Gruppenkommandeur* on 20 August 1942. The award of the *Ritterkreuz* followed on 17 March 1943, and he was elevated to *Geschwaderkommodore* of *ZG 1* on 12 April 1943. Three months later, on a mission in Bf 110 G-2, S9+BA, he was shot down by Russian fighters behind enemy lines and posted missing. Following his loss he was promoted to the rank of *Oberstleutnant*.

Herbert Schob

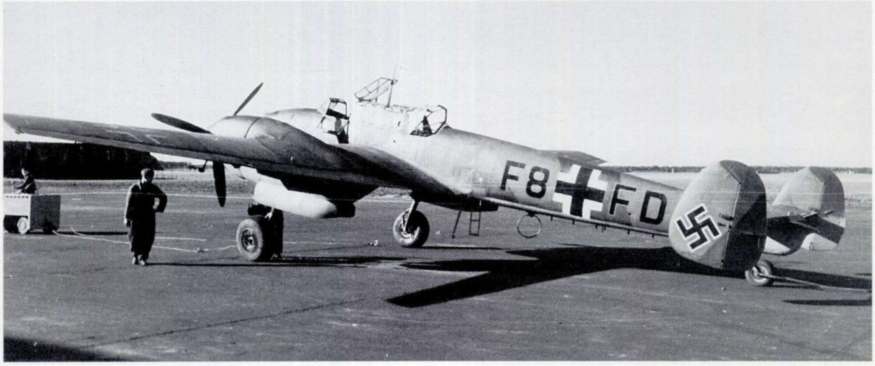
Herbert Schob flew with the Condor Legion, claiming six victories, and in March 1939 he was posted to *1.(Z)/LG 1*. He took part in the Polish campaign with this unit before being posted to *3./ZG 76* in April 1940. In September 1940 he was posted to a courier *Staffel* for a short period of time before being posted to *2./ZG 26* in April 1941. With *2./ZG 26* he took part in the Balkans campaign and the initial offensive against Russia in June 1941. In June 1942 he was posted to *Zerstörer Ergängszungsgruppe Deblin*. Promoted to *Leutnant* in February 1943, he was then posted to *1./ZG 76* in August 1943 and was appointed *Staffelkapitän* in December 1943. On 6 March 1944 he was shot down in combat with American P-51 Mustangs and wounded. He returned to *ZG 76* in May 1944 with the *Geschwaderstab*. He received the *Ritterkreuz* on 9 June 1944. After a further spell with the *Ergänzungszerstörergruppe*, he finished with the war in the *Geschwaderstab* of *JG 300*, with the rank of *Hauptmann*. He had flown more than 300 missions, with 28 victories, 10 of which were against American four-engined bombers.

Return to the Reich

Following their withdrawal from the major fronts, the two *Gruppen* of *ZG 1* had a relatively quiet time in the following months. With the ever increasing dominance of the air forces of the Western Allies, steps were taken to increase the complement of *Bf 110* units. Part of that undertaking resulted in *I./ZG 1* being re-designated *I./ZG 26* in October 1943. On 13 October 1943 the *Geschwaderstab* of *ZG 26* was re-formed at Wunsdorf. *II./ZG 26* was reformed at Hildesheim in October 1943 from *III./ZG 1* and was equipped with *Me 410* aircraft. *III./ZG 26*, at Plantlünne from August following its long sojourn in the African theatre, moved to Wunsdorf in October 1943.



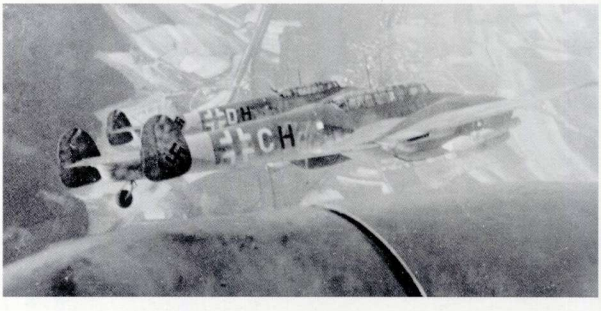
ABOVE: A Bf 110 of Ergänzungs Schlacht Gruppe is on the extreme right, with a Bf 110 of KG 30, coded 4D+RH, next to it.



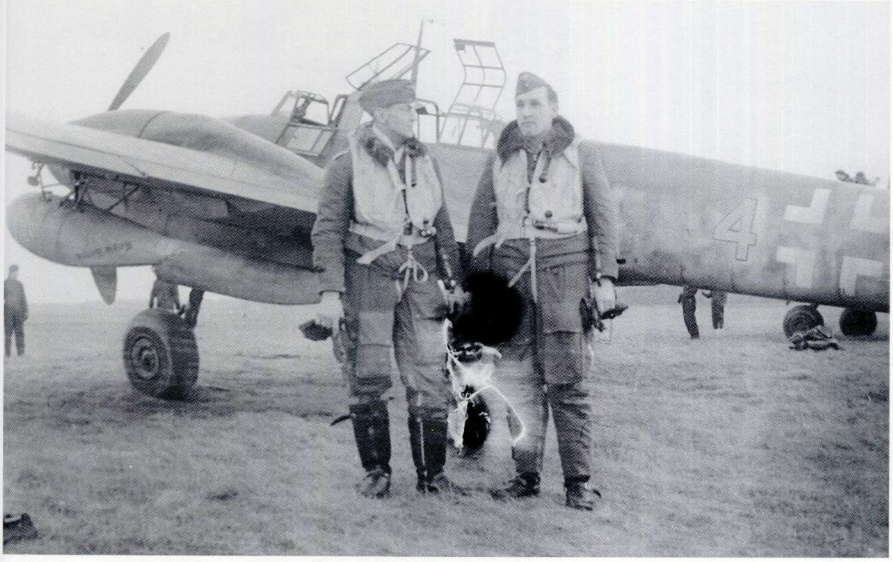
RIGHT: Bf 110, F8+FD, of the Gruppenstab of III./KG 40.

Another unit that was re-formed was *ZG 76*. That process started in August 1943 with the *Geschwaderstab* and *I. Gruppe* forming at Ansbach. *II. Gruppe* was raised at Wertheim in the same month, with *III. Gruppe* coming into existence in November 1943 at Öttingen. The formation of this latter *Gruppe* was never completed, and in April 1944 the personnel were incorporated into *I./ZG 76*.

II./ZG 1 remained in existence, operating in the Bay of Biscay area, providing air cover for the Atlantic-based German submarines. If Russian flak had been the major contributor to losses to *ZG 1* on the Russian Front, its new adversaries proved to be equally as lethal, but in the form of Allied fighter aircraft. 8 October was a particularly hard day for *II./ZG 1*, losing eight aircraft in combat with two more suffering damage with aircrew being killed in them. On the same day an attack on Brest-Süd airfield resulted in one *Bf 110 G-2* totally written off and another three

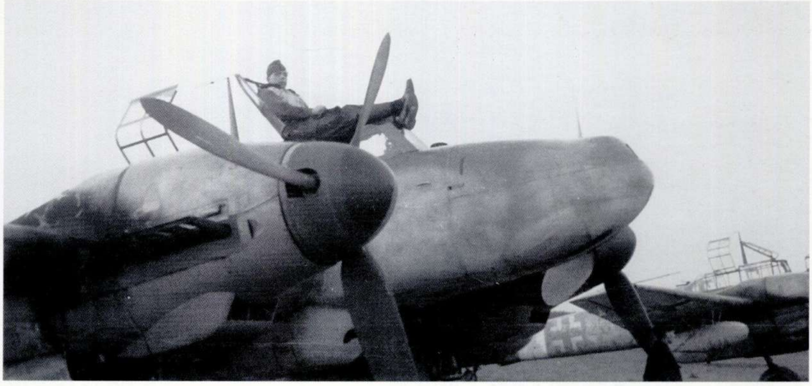


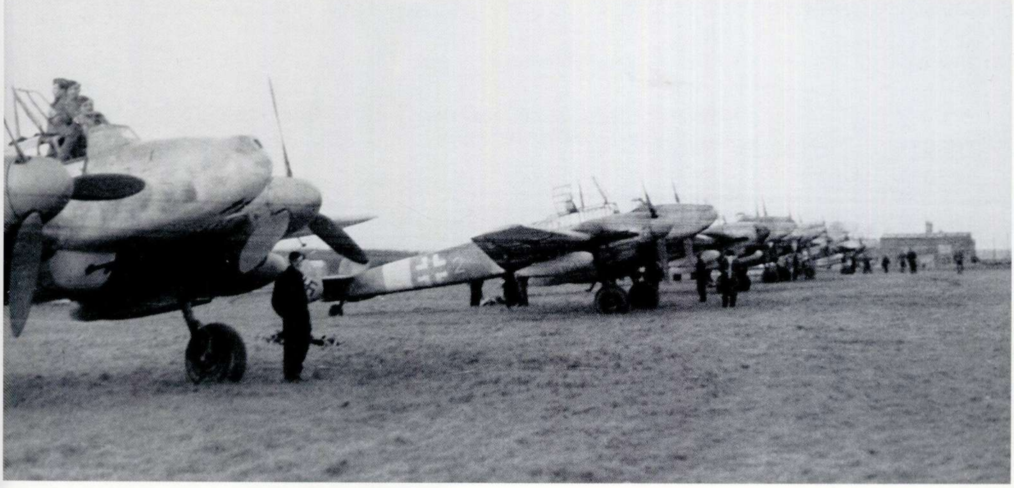
BELOW: M8+CH and M8+DH of 1./ZG 76 in late 1943. Both aircraft have white outline only fuselage crosses and a broad white fuselage band. Note the tailwheel scissors link on M8+CH. M8+CH also carries two W. Gr. Mortar tubes under each wing, and a supplementary fuel tank can be seen under the starboard wing.



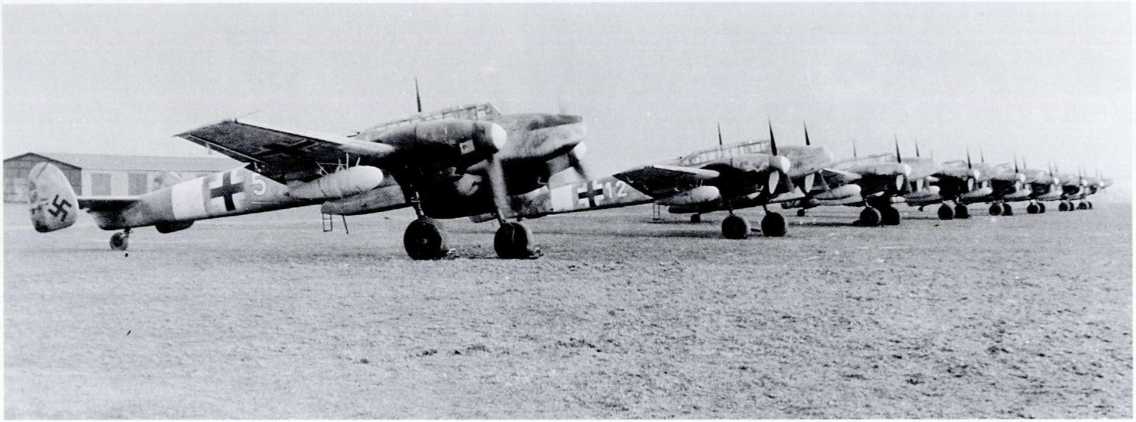
LEFT: An unknown crew pose in front of a Bf 110 G-2, Yellow 4, of 3./ZG 26 at Bad Lippspringe in late 1943. Note the supplementary fuel tank under the wing.

RIGHT: I./ZG 26 Bf 110 G-2s at Bad Lippspringe in late 1943. Note that no armament is carried in the upper nose of the nearest aircraft, but a pair of MG 151/20 cannons in a ventral tray is in place under the fuselage. The Bf 110 G-2 alongside it carries a broad white fuselage band on the rear fuselage and a supplementary fuel tank under the starboard wing.

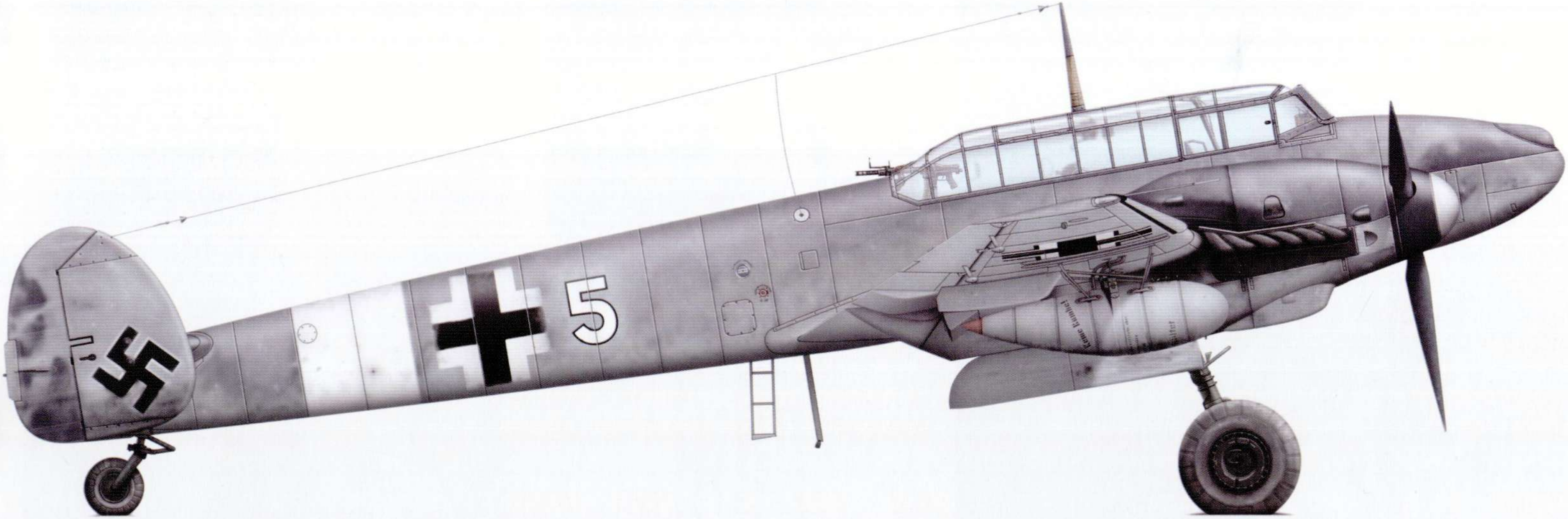




LEFT: Line up of 3./ZG 26 Bf 110 G-2s at Bad Lippspringe. Note the white outline only fuselage cross and broad white fuselage bans on 'Yellow 2'.

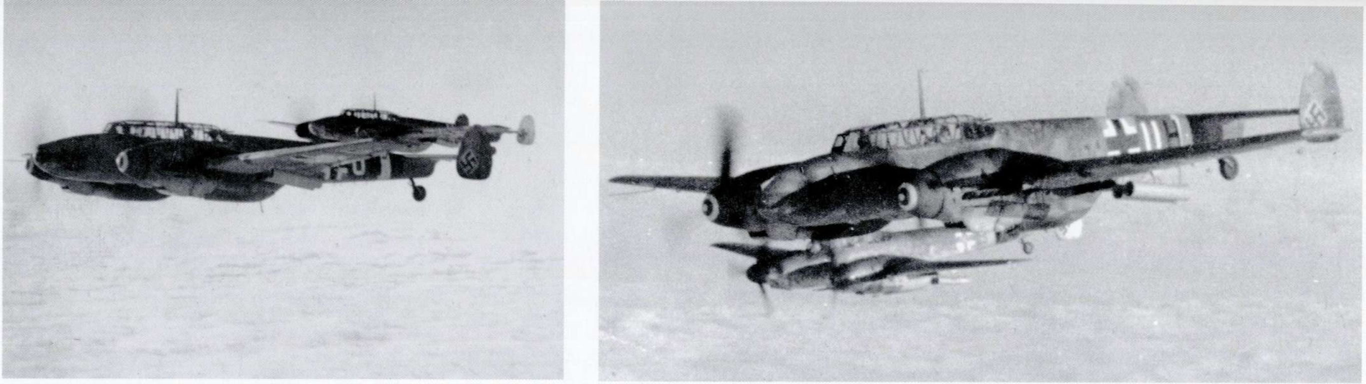


A view of 1./ZG 26 Bf 110 G-2s at Bad Lippspringe in late 1943. Underwing fuel tanks are fitted to the aircraft, and 'White 5' has the MG 151/20 belly cannon pack fitted.

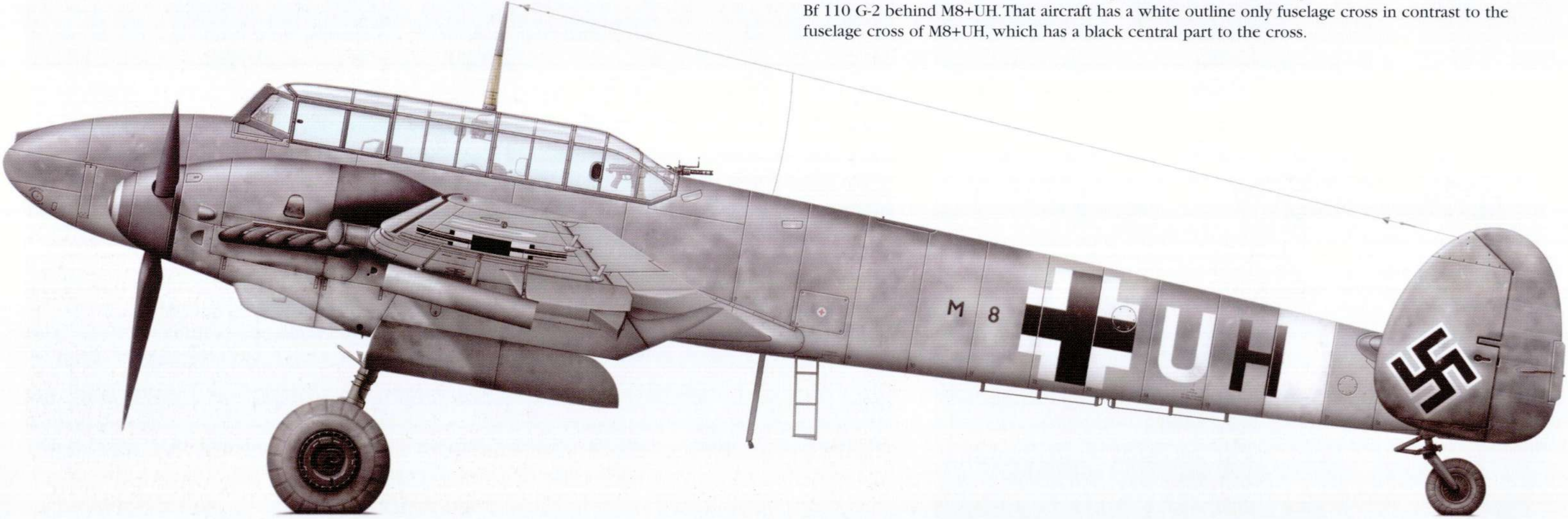


Messerschmitt Bf 110, 'White 5', of I./ZG 26

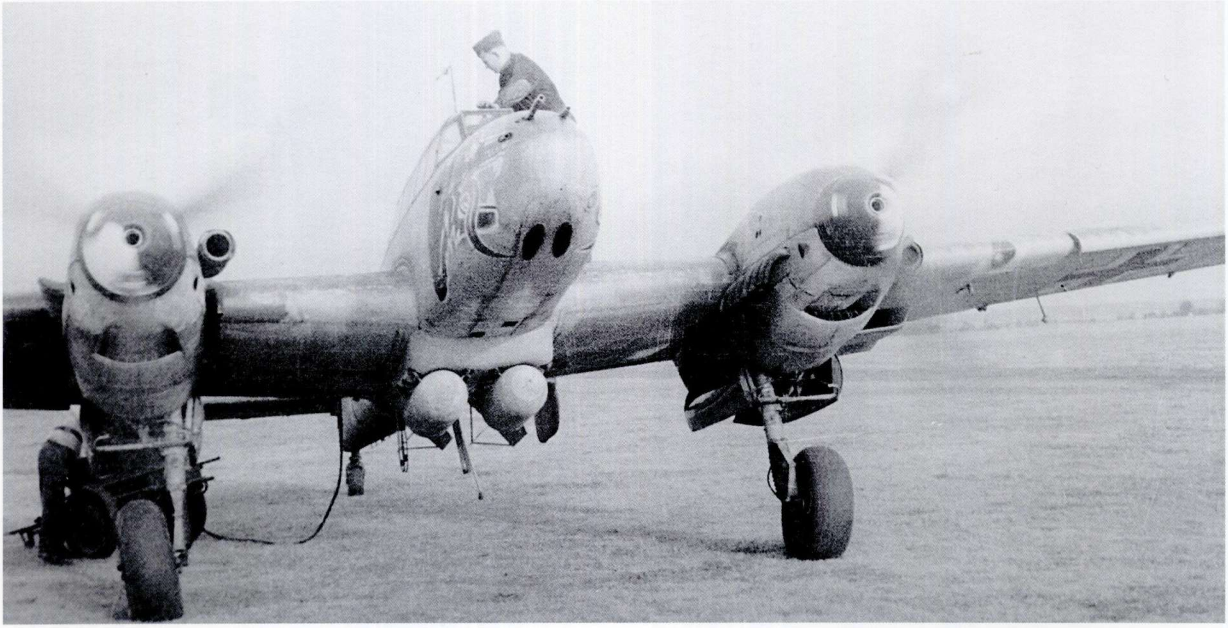
At some point in 1943 ZG 26 changed from having the four character code on the fuselage of its machine to the fighter style of numbers. White 5 of 1. Staffel has a broad white rear fuselage band and a dense spray of camouflage over the fuselage sides. The spinner tips are in the Staffel colour of white. The lack of armament in the upper nose points to the fitment of the GM 1 system to boost performance at high altitude.



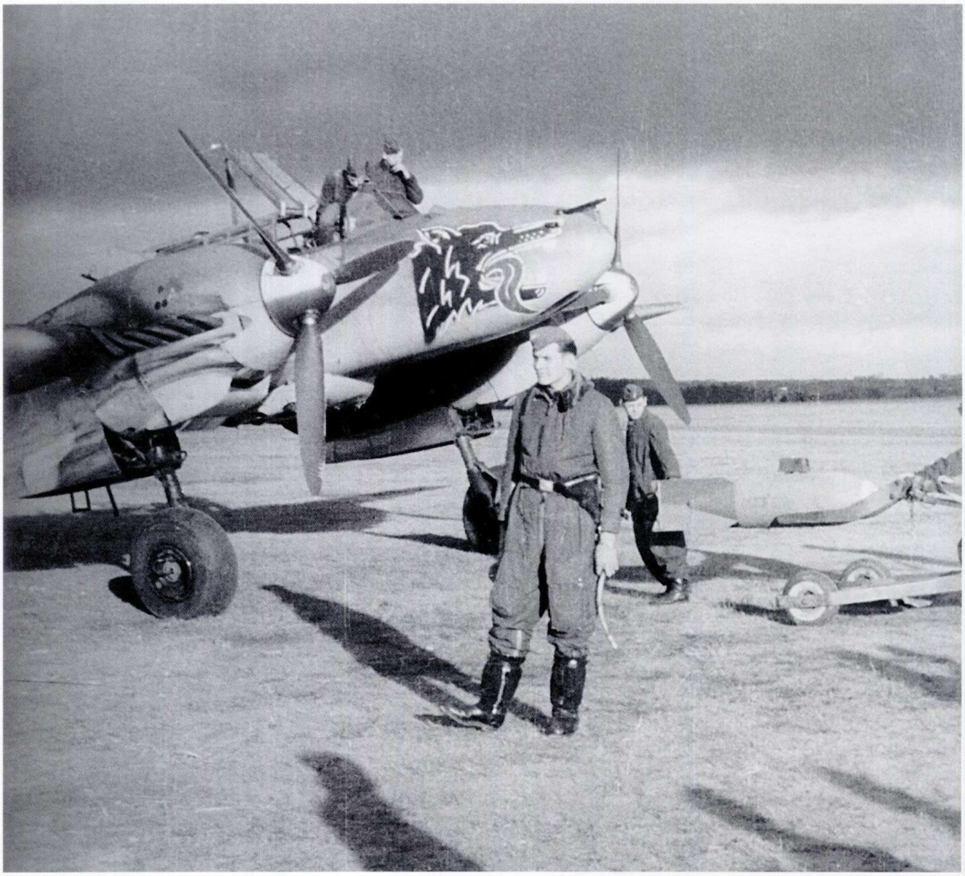
Two views of Bf 110 G-2, M8+UH, of 1./ZG 76. Note the two W. Gr. Mortar tubes under each wing, dating the photographs as August 1943 onwards. Note that the Staffel letter 'H' in the fuselage code slightly overlaps the thin white fuselage band. The pitot tube inboard of the starboard wingtip indicates this aircraft is from an early batch of 'G-2's. Of particular interest is the light coloured fin and rudder of the Bf 110 G-2 behind M8+UH. That aircraft has a white outline only fuselage cross in contrast to the fuselage cross of M8+UH, which has a black central part to the cross.

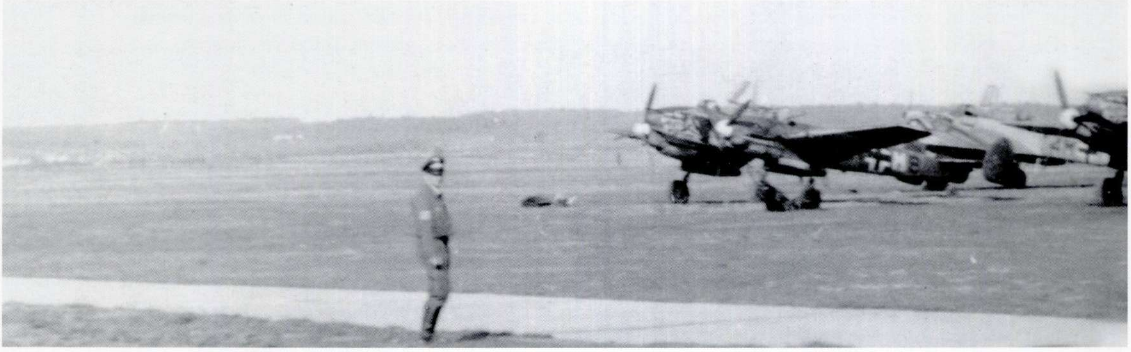


Messerschmitt Bf 110 G-2, M8+UH, of 1./ZG 76
M8+UH, of 1./ZG 76 seen on Reich defence duties. Features of the G-2 include an armoured windscreen, revised canopy and MG 81 Z rear armament. This G-2 has two 21 cm. W. Gr. Mortar tubes under each wing. Note that no armament is carried in the upper nose.



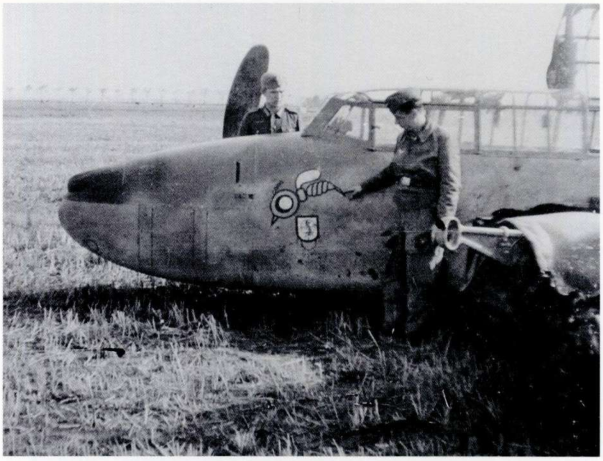
THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: Five views of Bf 110s of Ergänzungs Schlacht Gruppe (previously known as Ergänzungs Zerstörer Gruppe) carrying the distinctive large wolf's head on the nose of its aircraft.





suffering varying degrees of damage. Among the losses on this day was *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Karl-Heinrich Matern. Matern, who had taken over as *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 1* on 3 August 1943, was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* posthumously on the following day. He had flown *Bf 110*s since the beginning of the war, starting with *II./ZG 1* and following it through the re-designations, *III./ZG 76, II./*SKG 210 and the return to *II./ZG 1*. He had been *Staffelkapitän* of *4./ZG 1* since the summer of 1942 before taking up the post of *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 1* on 3 August 1943.

Activity for *II./ZG 1* diminished following this combat, and a move to Wels in Austria took place in November. Reference to any loss/damage to aircraft of the *Gruppe* did not occur again until February 1944.



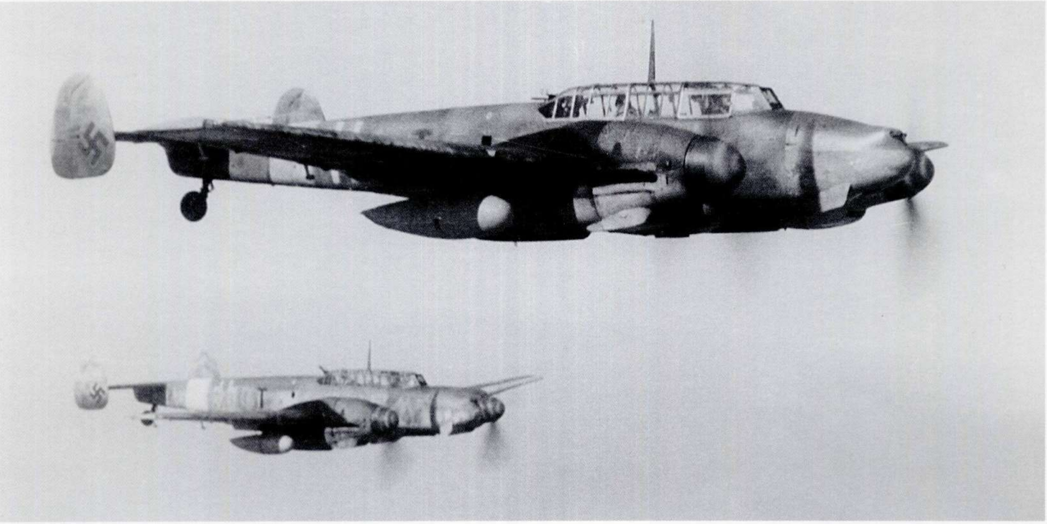
ABOVE: Rarely seen miniature emblems the Wespe and SKG 210 shield on a Bf 110 G-2 of ZG 1. The fuselage side carries a light mottle, while the lighter of the two top surface camouflage colours has been sprayed around the top of the Wespe. An armoured windscreen has been fitted.

ZG 26 meanwhile was soon in action against the heavy bombers of the US Eight Air Force. Intercepting a raid against Münster on 10 October, *II.* and *III. Gruppen* suffered losses. Four days later, *ZG 26* took part in the massive destruction of American bombers during the infamous raid on Schweinfurt. Following that, interceptions were infrequent, but the pace would quicken into 1944, and the heavy *Zerstörer* day fighters would find the odds increasingly stacked against them as American escort fighters finally had the increased range to accompany their bombers all the way to Berlin, and other deep penetration targets, and back.

1944

Defence of the Reich

11 January was the first occasion of the year when *Zerstörer* forces were called upon to intercept a large formation of American heavy bombers. The undoubted victory for the defending *Luftwaffe* fighter force, with 58 B-17s and two B-24s shot down in raids mounted against a range of industrial and aircraft assembly targets, was tempered by the fact that weather conditions militated against the escort fighters providing adequate cover. That would not be the case in the forthcoming weeks.



LEFT: These Bf 110 G-2s of 9./ZG 26 have supplementary fuel tanks under the wings, and the nearest aircraft carries a special chute believed to carry spent shells away from the propeller blades.

21 cm Werfergranate Mortar

With the increasing threat to the Reich from American Air Force daylight bombing, the *Luftwaffe* sought to equip its day fighters with the best possible means of bringing down the highest number of bombers during their incursions over occupied Europe and Germany. A special testing unit, *Erprobungskommando* 25, commanded initially by the former *Zerstörer* ace *Hptm*. Eduard Tratt, was set up to test the many and varied innovations to achieve that goal.

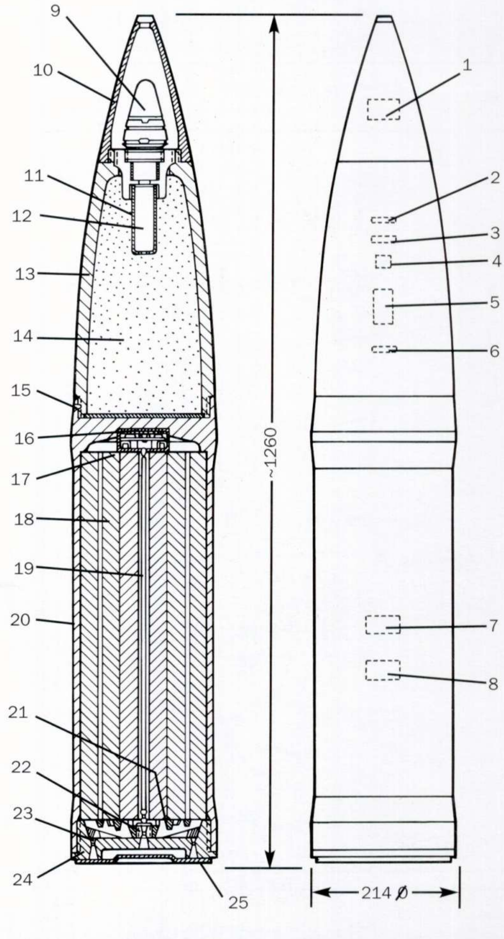
One of the ideas tested, and found suitable for operational use, was that of the 21 cm '*Nebelwerfer*' mortar. This was an adaptation of the Army's *Nebelwerfer* anti-tank weapon. The mortar was 1177 mm x 210 mm, and weighed 111 kilograms. The tubes from which they were fired were rifled as an aid to increased accuracy, although total accuracy was not possible due to the lack of accurate sighting equipment for the device. The tubes could be jettisoned by means of explosive bolts. With the usual configuration being two launchers under each wing of a Messerschmitt Bf 110, and exceptionally, as one photograph shows, an additional two under the fuselage, the purpose was to score a hit on a bomber, or cause such disarray among a bomber formation that the formation would be split up and leave individual bombers more vulnerable to fighter attack.

In Special Directive 110/865/055, dated 2 August 1943, it was directed that the Bf 110 should be fitted with the WGr. 42, 21 cm mortar. On 15 August the first Bf 110 G-2 to be fitted with the M5 modification, as the mortar was designated, was delivered.

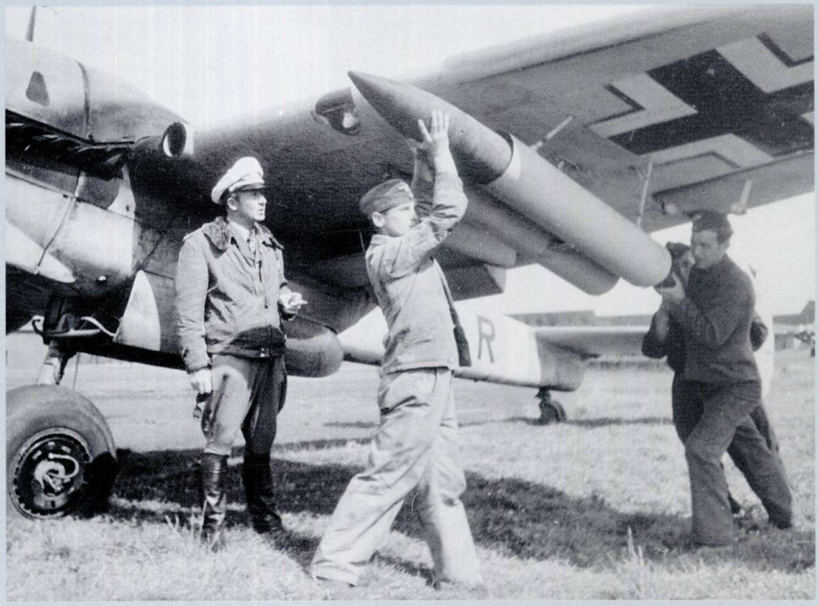
Key to 21 cm WGr. air-to-air mortar shell

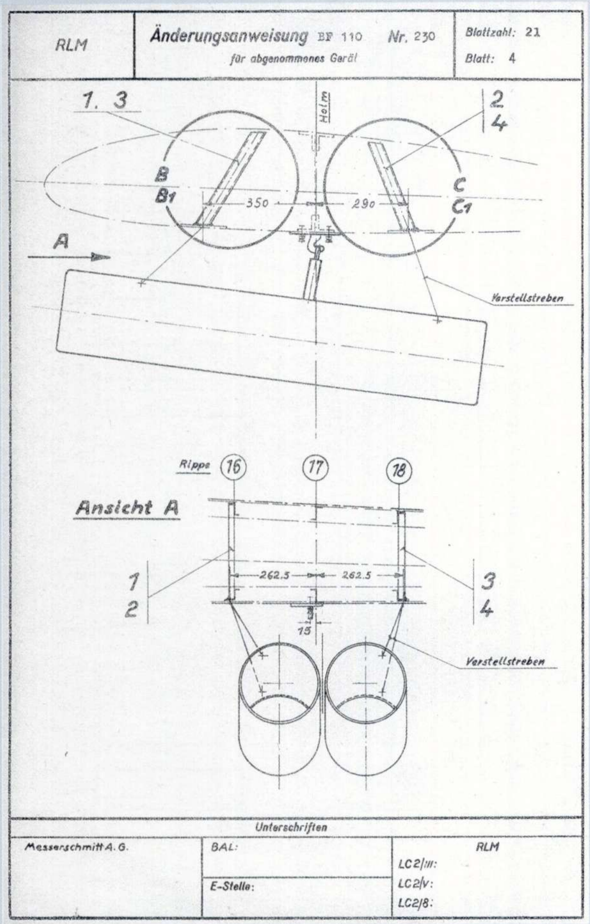
1. Fuse designation
2. Identification number for explosive. Month and year of loading stamped on.
3. Place, day, month, year of assembly and code mark of responsible agency (a)
4. Identification number for type of explosive.
5. Weight class in Roman numerals (a)(b) of assembled round.
6. Place, day, month, year of assembly of round (a).
7. Manufacturer's code, Lot No., year of loading propellant.
8. Place, day, month and year of assembly of propellant.
9. Time fuse S/30 and rocket combination fuse S/60.
10. Nose cone.
11. Adapter.
12. Booster 36F.
13 Explosive body.
14. Explosive charge.
15. Stake.
16. Igniter 65.
17. Base support.
18. Propellent (7 hole).
19. Ignition cord.
20. Casing.
21. Powder support.
22. Aluminium.
23. Igniter ring.
24. Turbine.
25. Closing plate.

Note: Colour of mortar RLM 02 (Grey) all over.
(a) Superimposed in black (b) In two places opposite each other



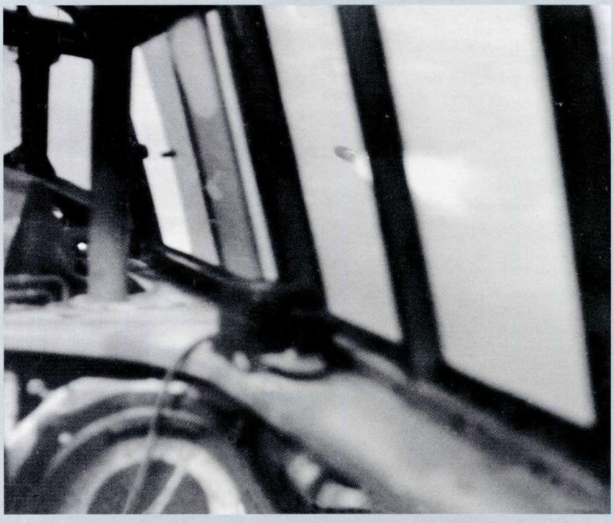
RIGHT: Ground crew fit a 21 cm mortar into the launching tube under the wing of a Bf 110 G-2 of 7./ZG 26 under the watchful eyes of Hauptmann Johannes Kiel.

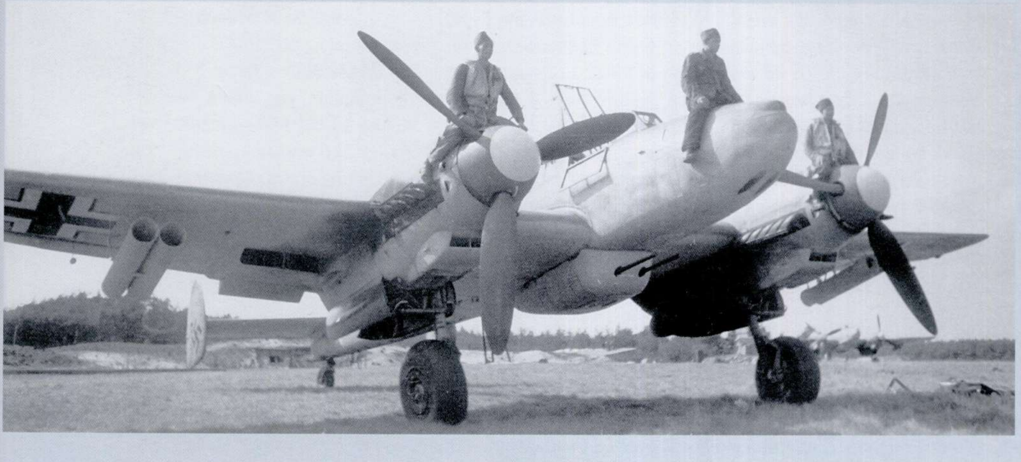



RLM
Änderungsanweisung BF 110
Nr. 230
für abgenommenes Gerät
Blattzahl: 21
Blatt: 4
1. 3
Holm
2
4
B
B1
350
290
C
C1
A
Verstellstreben
Rippe
16
17
18
Ansicht A
1
2
262.5
262.5
3
4
15
Verstellstreben
Unterschriften
Messerschmitt A.G.
BAL:
E-Stelle:
RLM
LC2/III:
LC2/V:
LC2/8:

LEFT: A page taken from an RLM issued document containing a drawing showing details of the in-field modifications needed to fit the twin-pack mortar tubes under the wings of the Bf 110.

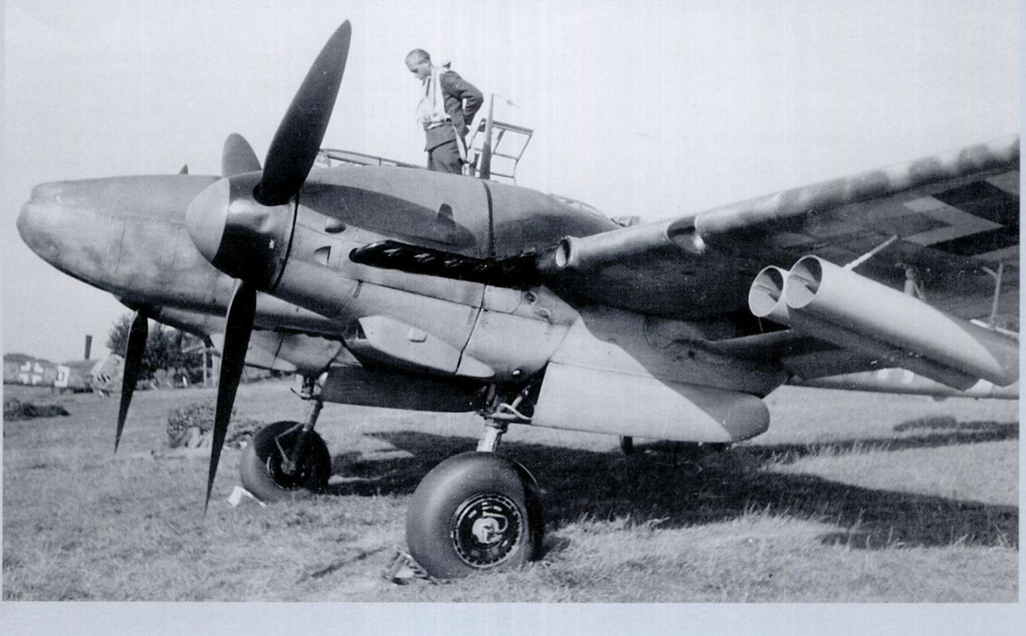
BELOW: View from the cockpit of a 21 cm mortar just after firing.

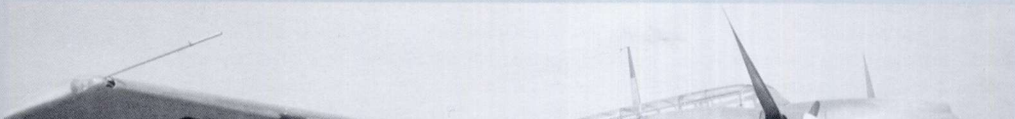




LEFT: A crew poses proudly on the engines of their Bf 110 G-2 with a mechanic on the nose. As well as the two mortar tubes under each wing, this Bf 110 G-2 has two MG 151/20 under the central fuselage. Note that the machine guns have been removed from the upper nose section.

RIGHT: Bf 110 G-2 with two mortar tubes beneath each wing and a very distinctive camouflage pattern on the leading edge of the port wing.





LEFT: This Bf 110 G-2 of 7./ZG 26, coded 3U+KR carries a white rear fuselage band and two mortar tubes under each wing. The underside of the starboard wingtip appears to be painted in yellow, with the individual aircraft letter, 'K', painted on it.

The USAAF's declared 'Big Week' in February would test the *Zerstörer* units to the limit. When the American escort fighters got their tactics right, the consequences for the intercepting *Bf 110*s were grave. On 20 February *III./ZG 26* lost 11 out of 13 *Bf 110*s put up against a USAAF raiding force.

Berlin was the target of the American 'heavies' on 6 March, and interception was made by elements of *ZG 26* as well as *I.* and *II. Gruppen* of *ZG 76*. *II.* and *III./ZG 26* lost 11 out of 17 aircraft deployed, a loss rate that could not be sustained. *ZG 76* lost four *Bf 110*s. The *Bf 110* was now proving to be inadequate for the duty of daytime interceptor, despite the bravery of its young crews. Following this setback, *I.* and *III. Gruppen* of *ZG 26* were withdrawn to Königsberg, north-east of Berlin, where they began conversion to the *Me 410*.

On 26 March a former *Bf 110* pilot was awarded the *Eichenlaube* to his *Ritterkreuz*, but this award was posthumous. *Hptm* Eduard Tratt, by now flying *Me 410*s as *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 26*, was killed in action on 22 February.

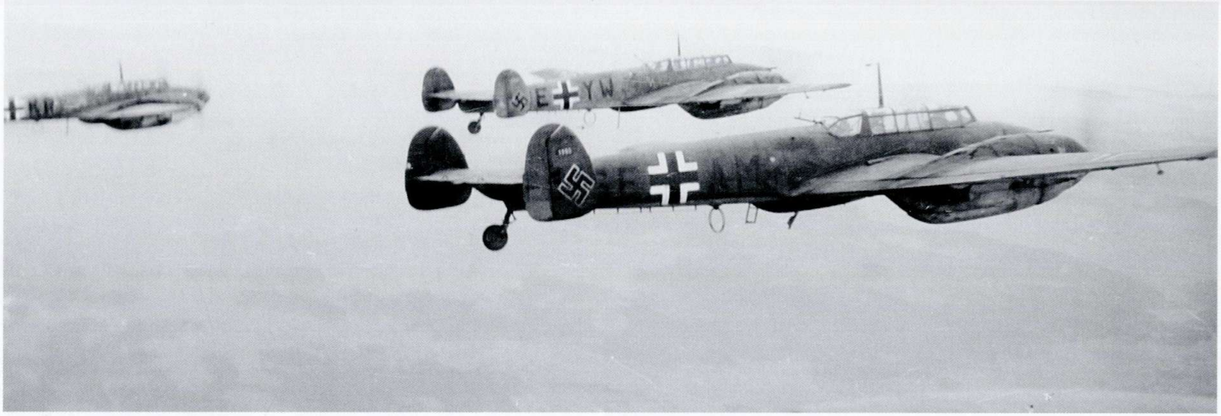
On 16 March *ZG 76* was able to put 43 *Bf 110*s into the air to intercept a raid heading for Augsburg. However, the unit suffered heavily, with 26 *Bf 110*s lost, and another ten damaged. This, in effect, sounded the death knell for the *Geschwader* as a *Bf 110* unit. In May it converted to the *Me 410*. Two members of *ZG 76* would receive recognition of their service by the award of the *Ritterkreuz* in the following months. *Oblt.* Herbert Schob received the award on 9 June, and *Fhj.-Ofw.* Werner Haugk was similarly decorated on 8 August. Whereas Schob would survive the war, Haugk was killed in action on 18 October.

To the south, from its base at Wels, *II./ZG 1* was facing incursions by bombers of the US 15th Air Force. Relatively light losses were suffered in February, but losses mounted on 2 April when four aircraft were shot down. Five further casualties were suffered on 12 April. Into May, two aircraft were shot down on the 6th, but the hammer blow came on 29 May, when 11 *Bf 110 G-2*s were shot down and a further three damaged with wounded crewmen on board. The casualties on 29 May included three officers from *6. Staffel*: *Oblt.* Herbert Pelz and *Lt.* Klaus Tillmann, both killed, and *Lt.* Siegward Wintehoff, wounded. The end effectively came for *II./ZG 1* on 26, 27 and 28 June, when ten *Bf 110*s were lost and a further four suffered varying degrees of damage. Officers were again to the fore in the losses. *4. Staffel* had *Lt.* Werner Witter and *Lt.* Wilhelm Stieghan killed, and *5. Staffel* had *Hptm.* Rudi Wangner killed in action. The *Wespengeschwader* finally ceased to exist in July 1944 when *II./ZG 1* were re-designated *III./JG 76*.

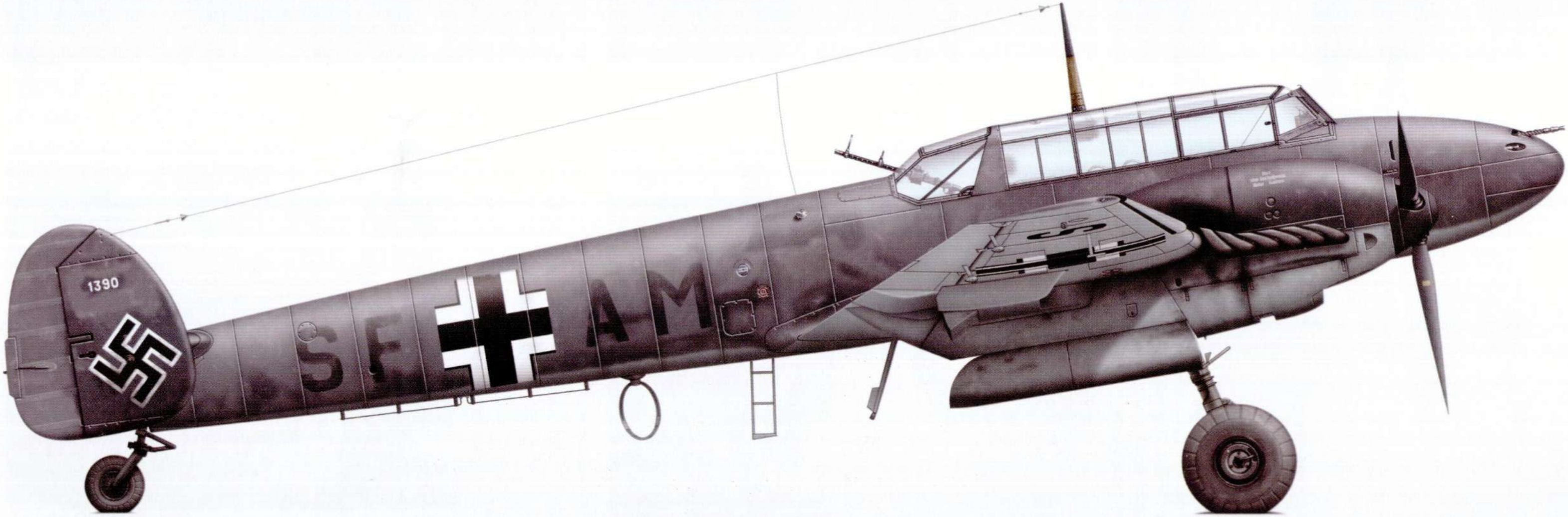
The Eastern Front – Final Phase

On the far northern Russian Front, the New Year brought little change in operations for *13.(Z)/JG 5*. A move took place in early January 1944 from Kirkenes to Kiestinki in Finland. From there the *Staffel* continued its attacks on the Murmansk railway. A brief return to Kirkenes ensued, but the *Staffel* finally left the base permanently on 14 February and took up residence at Herdla, where its duties would be the protection of convoys and coastal facilities. Occasional contact was made with RAF Beaufighters seeking out the German shipping. January and February saw the usual belly landings without any serious crew casualties, but in March, on one such interception of Beaufighters, the *Bf 110 G-2* of *Ofw.* Albert Mack, pilot, and *Uffz.* Rolf Mobius, was lost in action, the crew being posted as missing. The tedium of convoy protection continued throughout the following months until, in July, *13.(Z)/JG 5* finally severed its link with *JG 5*, being re-designated *10./ZG 26*, part of the new *IV. Gruppe* of *ZG 26*, retaining its base as Herdla. The new *12. Staffel* of this unit was also equipped with the *Bf 110*, being based at Oerlandet. *Staffelkapitän Hptm.* Treppe remained with the *Staffel*, and ultimately was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of *IV./ZG 26*. Duties remained the same, but with relatively little activity. By November, the *Staffel* was based at Trondheim. A further re-designation took place in February 1945 when the *10.* and *12. Staffeln* of *ZG 26* were incorporated into *7./JG 5*, part of the new *II./JG 5* with *Hptm.* Treppe at its helm. In the final weeks of the war the *Bf 110*s were relinquished and flying personnel was retrained on *Bf 109*s, but saw no action on this type before the end of the war.

Thus ended the daytime service of the *Bf 110*. It had witnessed heady success at times, but on far too many occasions it had proved not to be a match for the single-engined fighters of the Allies ranged against it. It would find its most successful role when deployed as a night fighter, taking a terrible toll of RAF night bombers at times. It could also lay claim to being at the forefront of the development of the fighter-bomber concept, which today is the primary strike aircraft in every air force in the world. In the final analysis, many of its young crews paid the highest price in training and active service while flying the *Messerschmitt 110*, the '*Zerstörer*', as it will be forever known in military history.

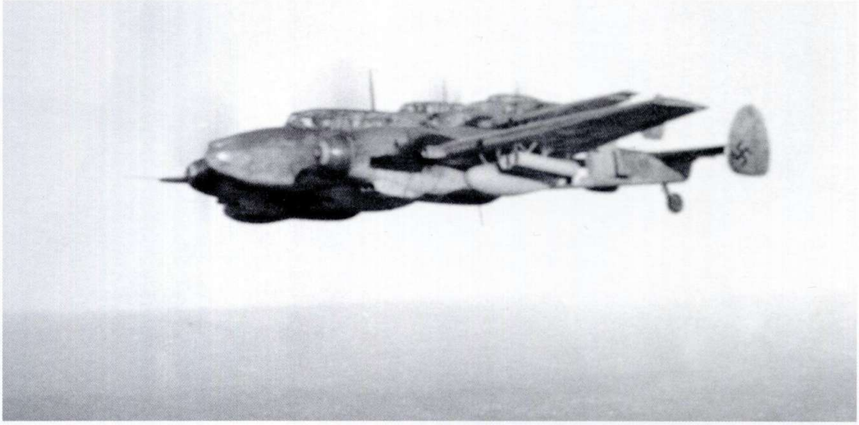


Aircraft of II./ZG 101 in February 1944. The nearest Bf 110, SF+AM, W. Nr. 1390, is a Bf 110 C-1 that has been converted for towing duties. The attachment point for the tow wire can be seen on the starboard wing root, as can the revised short rear fuselage for the pulley. The radio aerial, just visible forward of the small ladder, was standard for the radio sets fitted to the 'C-1' variant. DE+YW, W. Nr. 4456, is an 'E-2' variant. On the extreme left, TD+KR, W. Nr. 3637, is a 'C-7' variant.

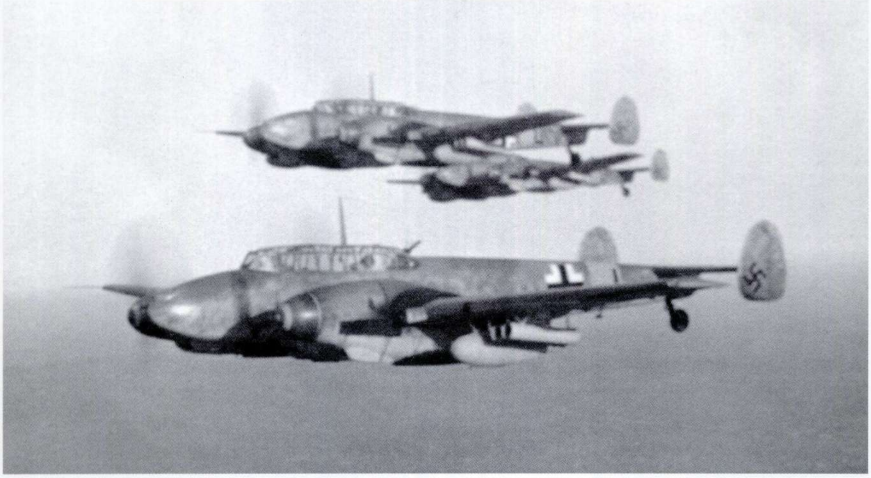


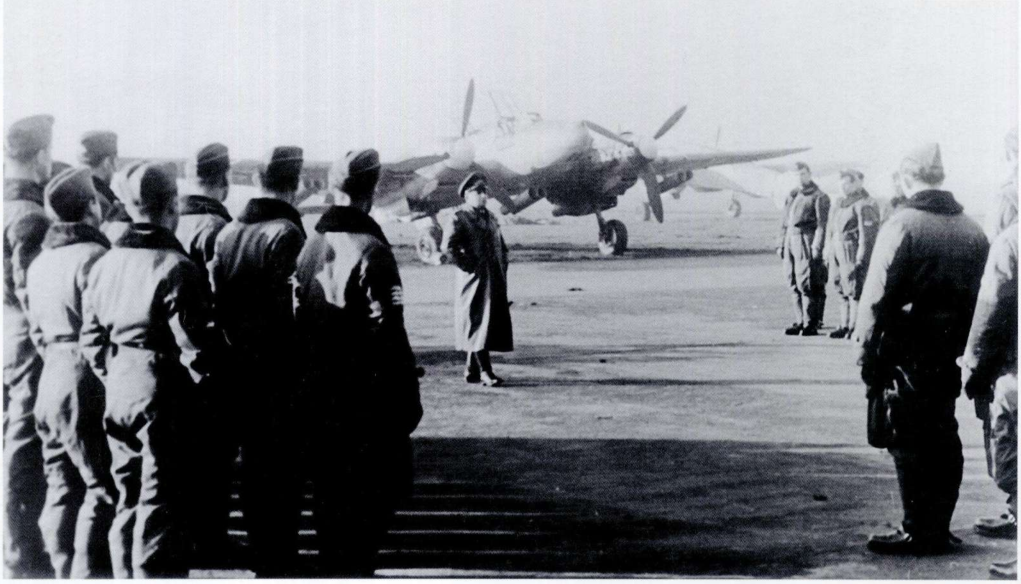
Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-1, SF+AM, of II./ZG 101

SF+AM, W. Nr. 1390, of the training unit II./ZG 101, seen in 1944. This aircraft is a Bf 110 C-1 that had previously undergone conversion for towing duties. It was passed to a training unit upon being released from such work. The rear view mirrors, normally attached forward of the pilot,s windscreen, have been removed, as has the cable that ran from the wing root attachment to the rear fuselage. The fuselage sides carry a mix of solid camouflage with the occasional darker area of camouflage. Note the armoured windscreen fitted.

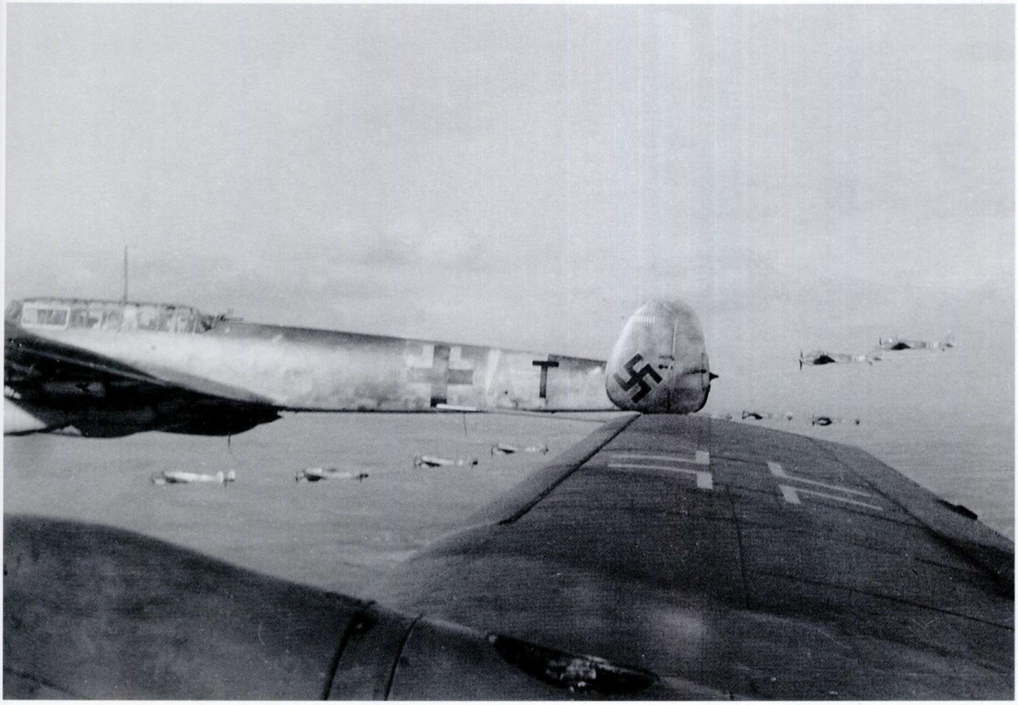


RIGHT AND BELOW: Two views of Bf 110 G-2s of 3./ZG 76. The fuselage band carried by these aircraft appears to be yellow when compared to the white of the fuselage cross. W. Gr. Mortar tubes can be seen under the wings as well as supplementary fuel tanks. A yellow ring in the Staffel colour of yellow is carried on the spinners.

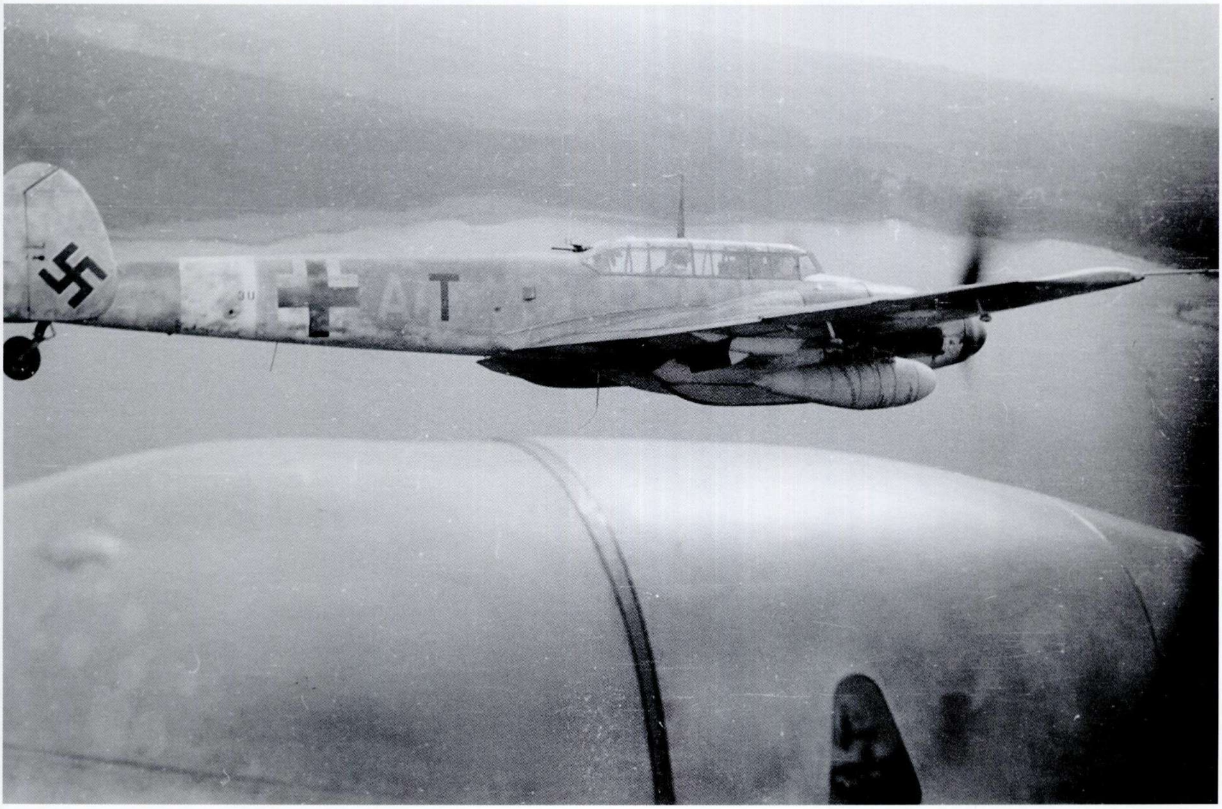


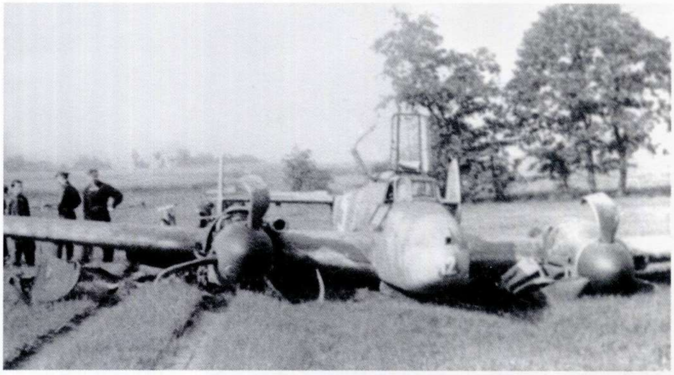


RIGHT: Gen Oberst Weise addresses personnel of III./ZG 26 at Wunsdorf. Note that the Bf 110 G-2 carries not only two W. Gr. Mortar tubes under each wing, but unusually, another two under the fuselage.

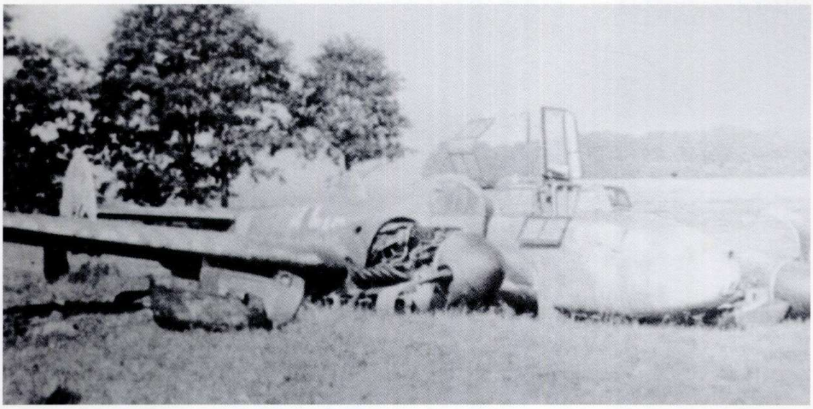


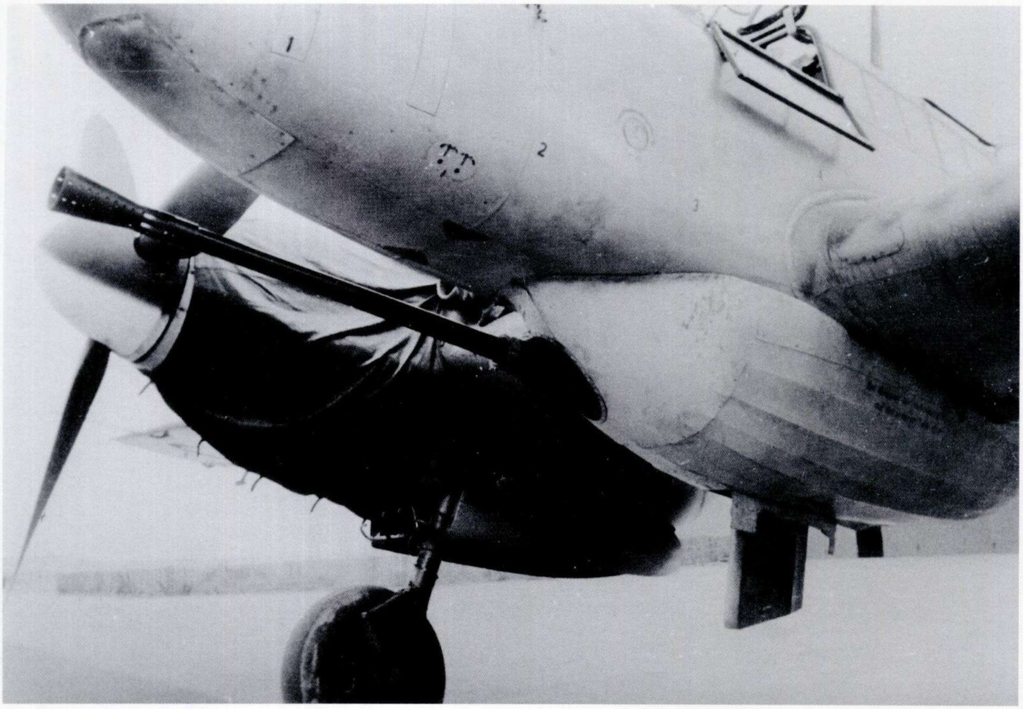
LEFT AND BELOW: Two views of Bf 110 G-2, 3U+AT, of the Staffelkapitän of 9./ZG 26, Oblt. Bley and Bordfunker Uffz. Heinemann. Note that the fuselage cross does not have any black outline to it. The fuselage band is white, and the individual aircraft letter is yellow with no outline. Supplementary fuel tanks are carried, and a single ring in the Staffel colour of yellow is carried on the spinner. Note that in the photograph on the left there are two Me 210s in the formation.



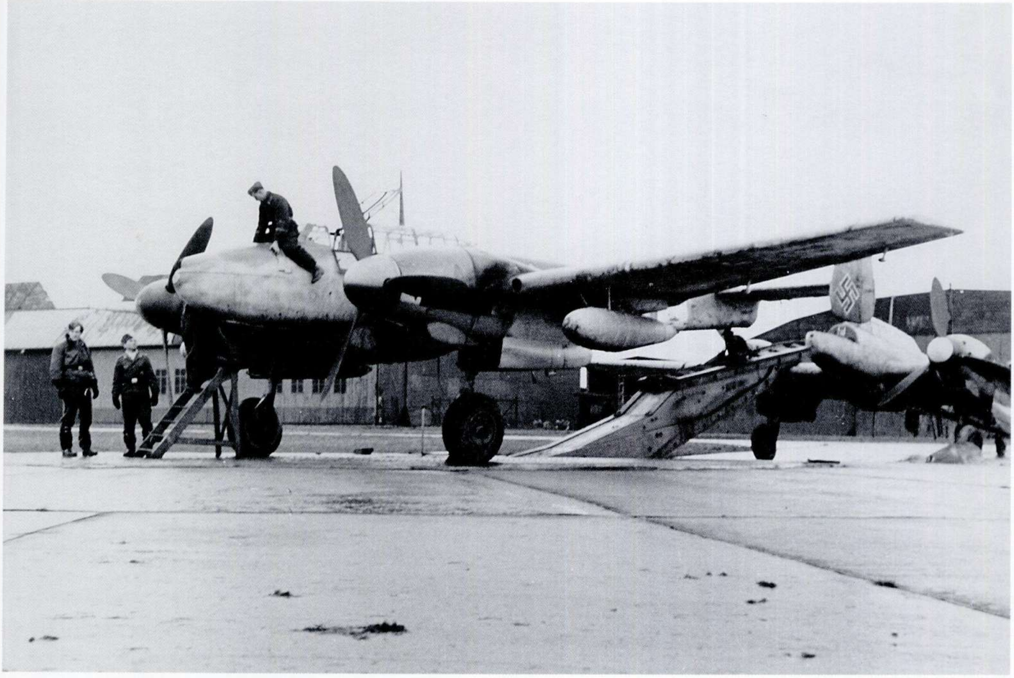


RIGHT AND BELOW: Two views of 'White 12' of an unknown unit which has its number repeated on the nose. A yellow band is carried on the rear fuselage.

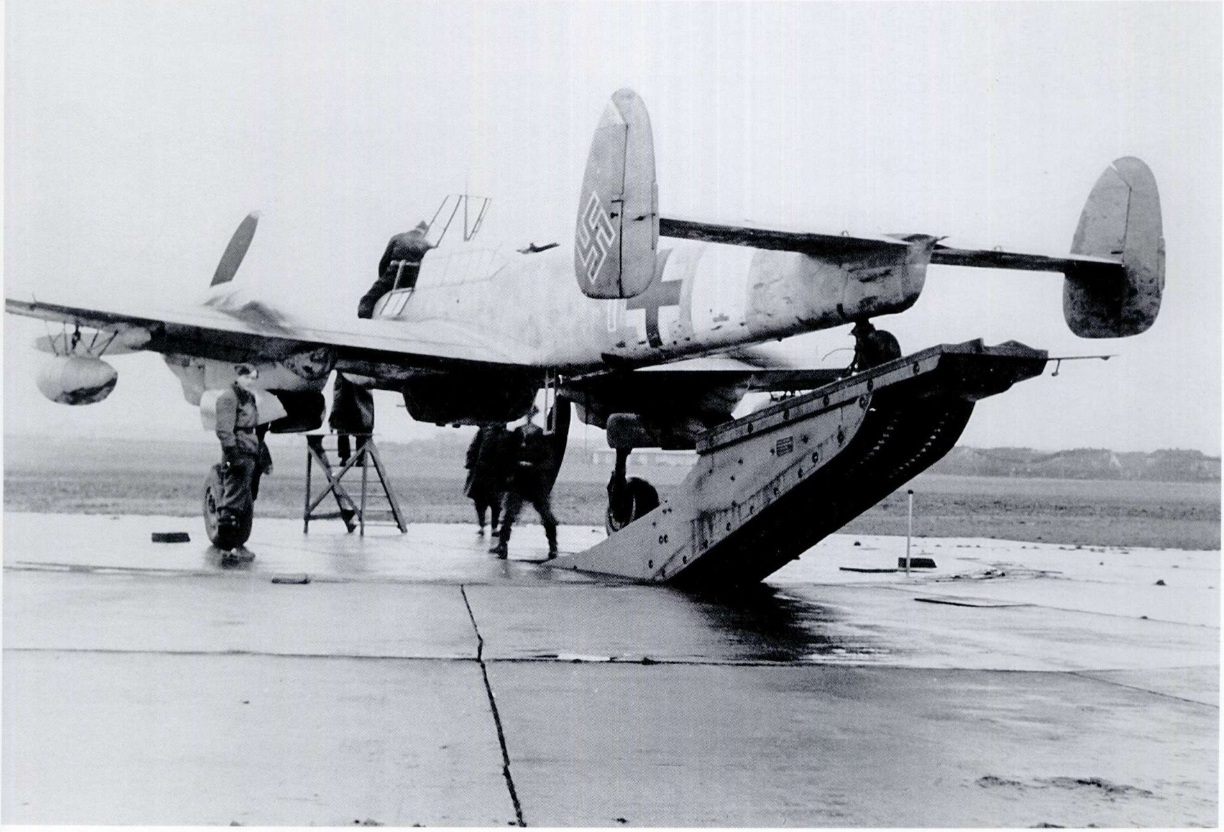


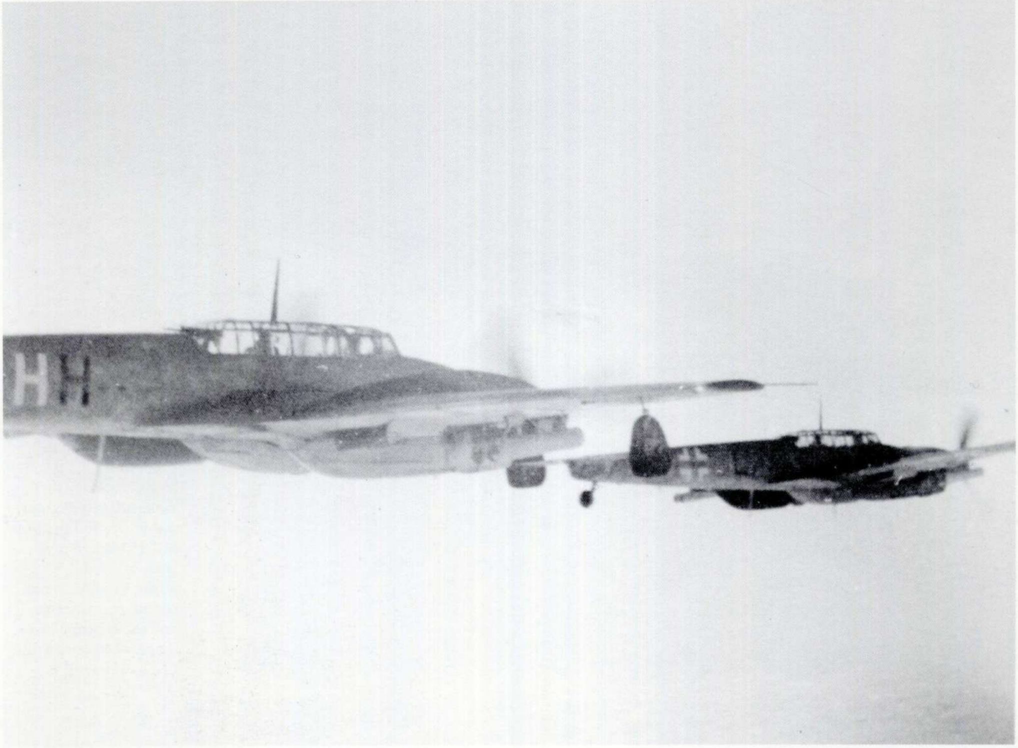


RIGHT: This view shows the 3.7 cm cannon offset-mounted to starboard in the large ribbed fairing in a Bf 110 G-2 day fighter.



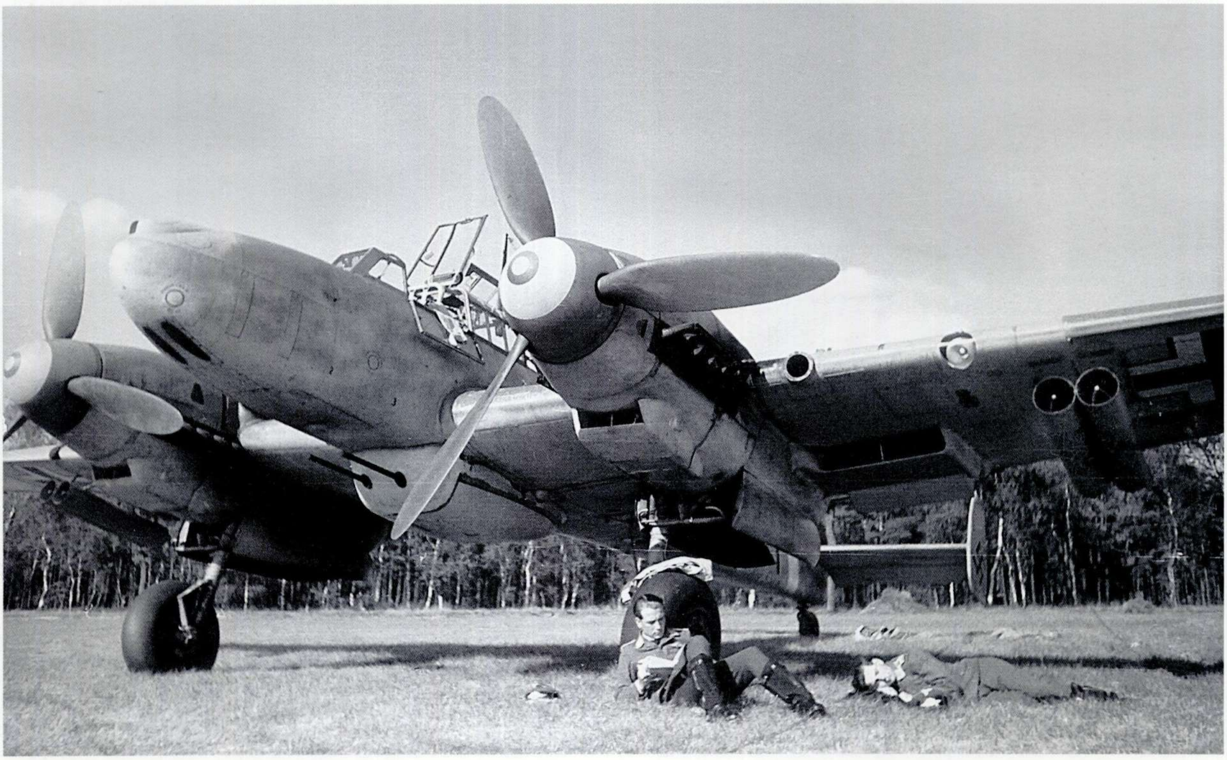
LEFT AND BELOW: Two views of a Bf 110 G-2 'Yellow 1' of an unidentified unit having its compass calibrated. Supplementary fuel tanks are fitted under the wings and the twin MG 151/20 ventral pack is fitted. A wide white band is carried on the rear fuselage, and the fuselage cross does not have any thin black outline to it.

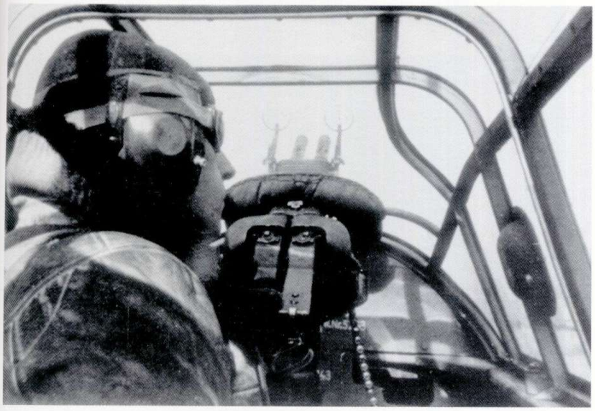




LEFT: These two Bf 110 G-2s both carry twin W. Gr. mortar tubes under the wings. The individual aircraft letter of M8+HH of 1./ZG 76 is white without any outline. The Bf 110 ahead of it is from 3./ZG 76.

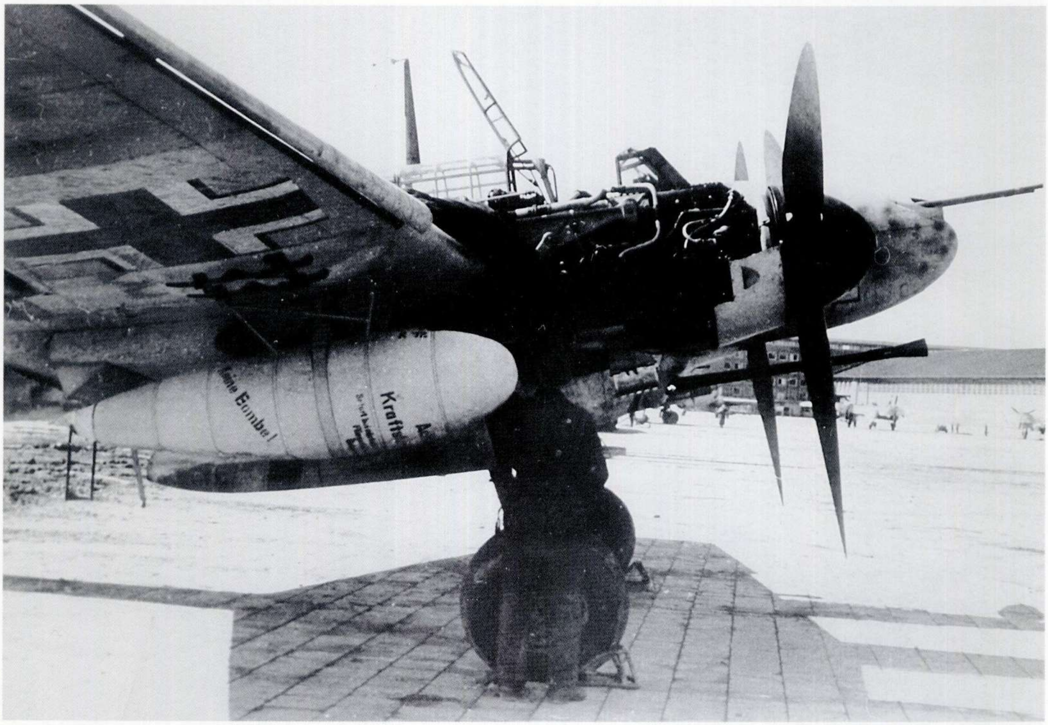
BELOW: The crew of this Bf 110 G-2 relax beneath their aircraft which has twin W. Gr. Tubes fully loaded under each wing. The twin MG 151/20 pack can be seen under the fuselage, and the nose of the aircraft shows that no machine guns are carried. A broad white band is painted on each spinner with a small white centre to each.

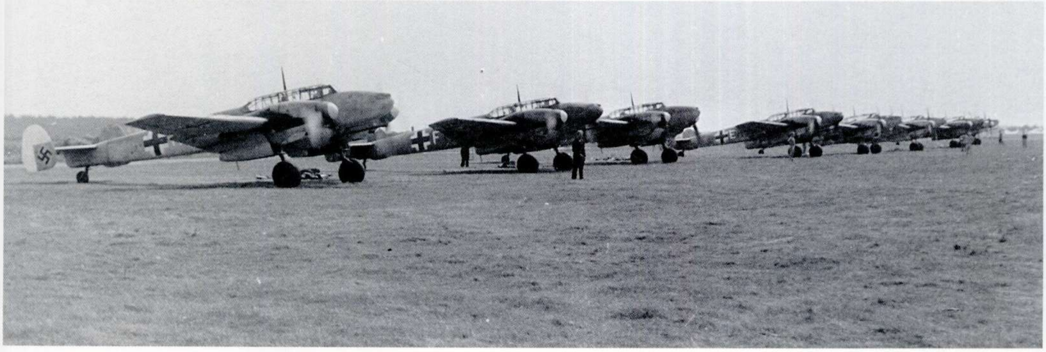




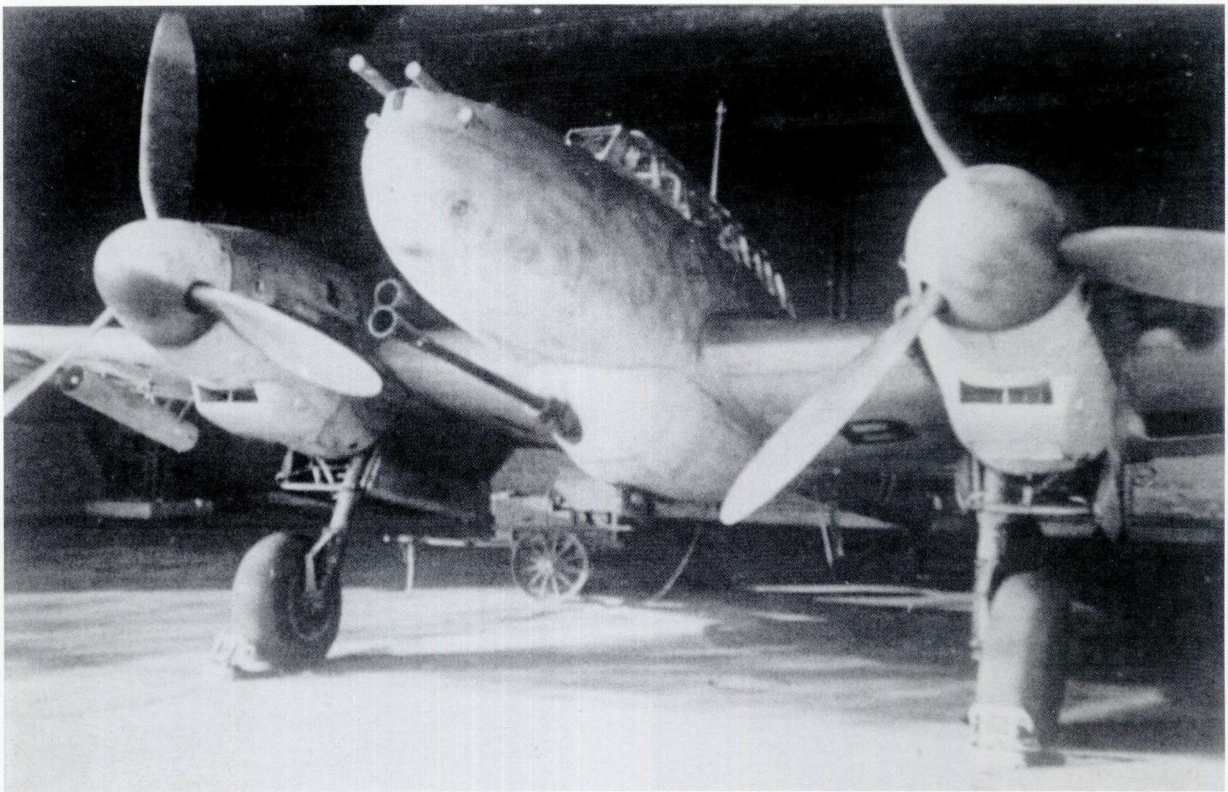
LEFT: This view of the Bordfunker's cockpit area of a ZG 1 Bf 110 G-2 shows the W. Nr. 5243 repeated twice on the panel in front of the Bordfunker. The MG 81 Z twin machine guns are shown to excellent effect, as are the twin gunsights.

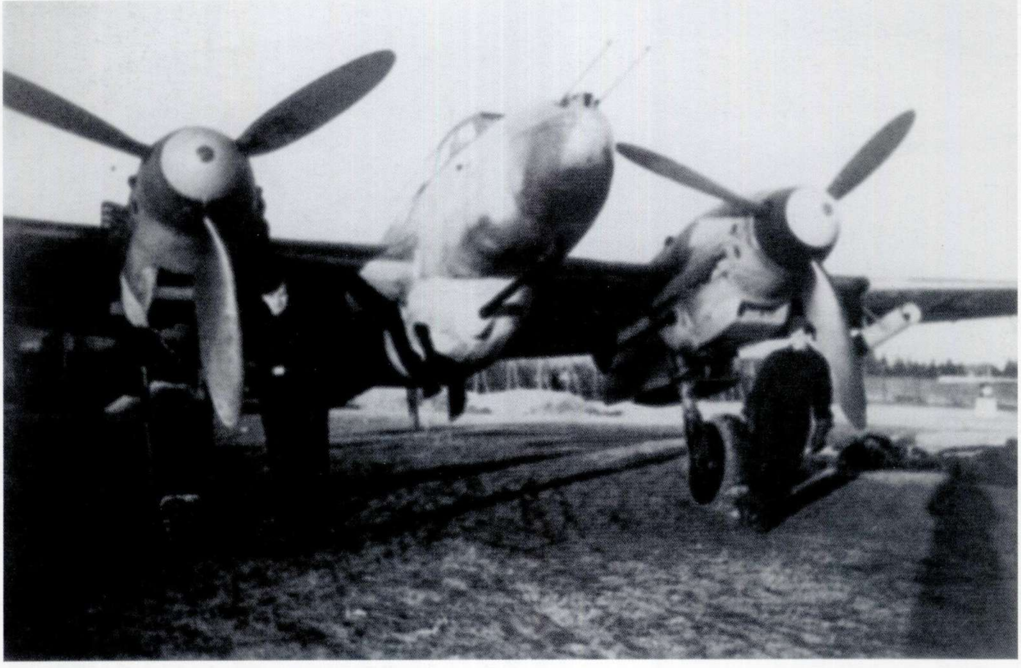
BELOW: This Bf 110 G-2 day fighter packs a powerful punch in its forward firing armament, with a 3.7 cm cannon under the fuselage and two MG 151/20 cannon in the top of the nose. Of interest is the stencilling on the supplementary fuel tank under the wing, particularly the words 'Keine Bombe!' (not a bomb!). The lower starboard wing appears to be painted yellow from the wingtip to a point just outboard of the cross.





LEFT: Line up of Bf 110 G-2s with the nearest aircraft having a white painted rudder and top area of the fin. The exact reason for this marking is not known, but would possibly be the machine of the formation leader.





ABOVE: This Bf 110 G-2 is fitted with an unusual mix of forward-firing armament, consisting of the 3.7 cm cannon under the fuselage, four machine guns in the upper nose, and a single W. Gr. mortar tube under each wing.

LEFT: This G-2 shows yet another combination of armament, with the 3.7 cm cannon in place, a pair of MG 151/20s in the upper nose, and a single W. Gr. mortar tube under each wing. Evidence points to a bewildering array of forward armament being used on Bf 110s in an attempt to arrive at the best solution to combat the American four-engined heavy bombers.